

Chapter 1 – Grief

Lord Voldemort dropped to the ground exhausted. Deep wounds spilled blood onto his robes. His left arm ended in a stump at the elbow. The wound, cauterized by the heat of the spell that severed it did not bleed much, but still exceedingly painful. Voldemort grasped for his wand but realized it was missing.

A pair of boots with tattered robes above them appeared in front of him. With an effort, Voldemort looked up at the young man who had defeated him. Hatred filled the dying Dark Lord as he saw the blazing emerald eyes of his opponent. Even though his hate, Voldemort could feel his life and magic slipping away. The dying Dark Lord recognized his own wand in the hand of his rival.

The attack had been implemented perfectly. Potter's blood-traitor friend Weasley and the mudblood Granger had been captured two weeks prior. Voldemort and his Death Eaters allowed the traitor Snape to warn of an attack on Hogsmead. The arriving Aurors and Order members found Voldemort with all of his Death Eaters and allies waiting for them.

Voldemort presented the battered, violated and maimed bodies of Potter's friends. Draco Malfoy cast an Imperious Curse on Weasley. The cursed redhead teen proceeded to rip his girlfriend to pieces with a dark curse. Then young Malfoy released Ron to the reality of what he had done. They allowed him to live just long enough for the grief and pain to fully set in.

As planned, Potter lost control and started the battle. His Death Eaters and allies had driven the damned Order and Aurors back and left just their Master and his opponent to fight. The battle had raged all over the grounds of Hogwarts. The castle itself lay in ruins, only the Astronomy tower still standing. The bodies of Death Eaters and their opponents filled the grounds.

Ginny Weasley attempted to support Harry after Voldemort blasted him to the ground with an ancient curse. She momentarily distracted Voldemort and allowed Harry to recover his wand. As she concentrated on Voldemort, she did not see the troll approach her from behind and smash her into the ground with a club.

Harry Potter could only watch in stunned disbelief as his girlfriend was killed instantly while defending his life. Voldemort started to laugh at the pain and despair on the young man's face. Harry turned to face his life-long nemesis. Voldemort stopped laughing as the hero of Light started to glow. Suddenly a blinding flash and a wall of force pulsed out from Harry. Lord Voldemort just had time to erect his strongest shield before the power washed over him. The troll was thrown to the ground with such force that it shattered all of the bones in its body. Voldemort avoided most of the magical force behind his shield. Even his shields failed under that onslaught, leaving him defenseless, battered and broken.

"It seems the Prophecy favored you, Potter. But you won't enjoy your victory!" the dying Dark Lord grasped. It was not fair! After all of his studies and sacrifices, defeat by this whelp was not fair!

Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, the Chosen One, stood over the broken body of the man who killed everyone that he had ever loved. His parents, Sirius, Remus, all the Weasleys, Hermione, and Dumbledore all died because of this twisted thing before him.

Harry looked to where Ginny had fallen. They had established a bond over the last year, linking their magical energies. The backlash from her death fed the magical explosion that brought the battle and war to an end. "Why? Why did you have to do this?" the anguished question came from Harry's dry throat.

Voldemort gasped out a chuckle. "Why?" he hissed. "I learned the world is never fair. The strong take from the weak. To the victor goes the spoils."

Harry raised his wand with tears running down his cheeks and pointed it at the fallen Dark Lord. "I learned the same lesson. The world is not fair, but you still have to try. *REDUCTO!*"

The spell smashed into Voldemort's head, crushing it. The Second War was over.

(Six months later)

The hero of the wizarding world slumped over the table in his kitchen smelling of a great deal of fire whiskey. The last six months had been the worst of Harry's life. Harry had no reason left to live. Today was Harry's 18th birthday, a birthday without a single person to share it with him. They were all gone. Harry settled into a deep depression with no one to pull him out. At times, he pulled his wand out and pointed it at himself.

The magical community held a weeklong celebration over the final death of Voldemort and the end of the war. Everyone wanted to thank Harry for ending the threat. Almost all of the Ministry's Aurors and the Order of the Phoenix members died during the battle. Yet that did not seem to matter to most of the witches and wizards. They only cared that the Chosen One had ended their fear.

Many of the surviving members of the Ministry were pushing Harry to take the Minister of Magic position. Harry sensed they did not want him to lead them, but a figurehead to support their own positions. Didn't they realize that Harry never wanted to be a public person? All he wanted was to be left alone!

After the first week, Harry had taken to hiding in Hagrid's old hut on the Hogwarts grounds. The school itself was unlivable. The castle's damage was too significant to be safe. The Ministry was openly debating on permanently closing the school and moving it to a more convenient and modern location. The thought of being one of the few surviving members of the final Hogwarts graduates depressed Harry even further.

Harry suddenly awoke at a sudden noise and sluggishly raised his head to squint about the room. Harry noticed a blurry figure of a man sitting at the table across from him. Harry fumbled for his glasses and placed them on his face. Again, he squinted at the figure and was shocked.

"Professor Dumbledore?"

The figure stood up and grabbed Harry by the back of his dirty shirt. "Stupid boy. You are disgusting."

Harry was dazed and confused as the figure dragged him out of the hut. What was Dumbledore doing here? He died during Harry's sixth year two years ago! How could he be here? The thoughts stumbled around Harry's drunken brain in a chaotic dance.

The dance suddenly ended in a freezing wet shock. Suddenly Harry could not breathe! He was underwater! He was drowning! Vainly Harry struggled against the grip that held him by the neck in the rain barrel outside the hut. The pressure suddenly lessened allowing Harry to push himself up and get some air.

"WHAT DO YOU..." Harry's shout was ended by another forced plunge into the barrel. After a seeming eternity, Harry was again released from the grip.

Harry pushed himself away from the barrel, falling hard onto the packed earth. Harry struggled to take deep breaths and wipe the water away from his face. A mug was thrust in front of his face and Harry heard a gruff but familiar sounding voice tell him to drink it.

Harry grasped the mug and drank the contents in a single shot.

"Great Merlin!" Harry swore, "That stuff is horrible!"

However, between the dunking and the potion, Harry felt his head clearing rapidly after his three-week bender. Harry looked up at this attacker again.

At first glance, Harry could see an immediate resemblance to his former Headmaster. Both of them were tall with long white beards. This person did not have the Headmaster's signature twinkle. Harry saw anger in his eyes. A fire that refused to be put out.

"Who are you?" Harry asked

The man extended a hand to the sodden young man sitting on the ground in front of him. Harry took his hand and the man pulled Harry up.

"I am Aberforth Dumbledore. You knew my idiot, goody-two shoes older brother."

Harry shook his head to clear his thoughts. "You are Professor Dumbledore's brother? He mentioned you."

The man grunted, "Probably the damn story about the goat. Did he mention that he spiked my butterbeer with an altered love potion and put a glamour on the goat? I thought it was my wife."

Harry chuckled weakly at the thought of Professor Dumbledore playing a prank on his brother like that. Small as it was, it was the first feeling of true humor Harry had felt since Ron and Hermione disappeared.

Harry followed Aberforth back into the hut. They took their seats around the table. Harry pushed the mostly empty bottle of fire whiskey away. It contained only enough for a single shot, yet the smell suddenly turned Harry's stomach.

"You have been hard to find, boy," Aberforth said.

"I tried to be. I couldn't take the celebrations anymore," was his reply.

"I was afraid I would only find a body."

Harry merely grunted noncommittally to this comment.

"Your scar has faded a lot. We need to move quickly," Aberforth said.

Harry was confused. "What do you mean we have to move quickly? Let the damn scar go away. I can hide better that way."

Aberforth shook his head. "No we need it. I have been looking for you for a month." The old wizard leaned forward in his chair. "Would you like a chance to set this right?"

"What do you mean? How?" Harry asked.

"I mean save my brother, your parents, everyone!" Aberforth said.

Harry was stunned. Save everyone? How? They were dead.

Aberforth smiled a sly, creepy smile. "We are going to steal a page out of Voldemort's own book, boy. We are going to kill him as an infant."

Now Harry was really shocked. For the first time since the battle, Harry felt his brain fully engage. "How can we do that?"

"Simple, go back to when he was born and kill him."

Harry sat back in his chair. "We can't travel in time."

"I have a way. I can supercharge a TimeTurner, but it has a cost," Aberforth said. Harry merely raised an eye. "The first is you take the trip back but you are stuck there for a while."

"What do you mean a while?" Harry asked.

"Ten to twelve years. The magic needs to recharge in the TimeTurner."

Harry started to feel a hunger in him. Ten years to save everyone he loved? No problem. Harry waved off the issue. "What is the other problem?"

Aberforth exhaled, "This is a weird area of magic. There is a large risk. No one has ever gone back that far. When you return the world might be worse off than it is today. Also you can have unintended consequences. Things that seem unrelated are changed by what you did. When you return you will have the memories of this timeline but probably not of the new one. You would in effect be killing another version of you."

"Why me?" Harry asked. "Why can't you do this?"

"Your scar, boy. It links you to Voldemort. The magic can use that to allow you to appear in his area when you go back. Without the scar, you would have to search all of England to find him. Also, I am already there. My magical signature would be duplicated. Anytime someone sent me an owl there would be a 50-50 chance on who it would go to. The secret would not last long." The old wizard scowled,

“I did not always like the old fart, but he was my older brother. Family I want him back.”

Harry considered this. This was a chance to prevent Voldemort from ever becoming a danger to anyone. Harry felt a slight pang about killing an infant but it also seemed that turn about was fair play. After all, Voldemort tried to kill him as a one year-old. The lives it would save made this more than fair. After some of the things Harry accepted during the war, this seemed simple.

Harry looked up at the waiting Aberforth Dumbledore. “When do we start?”

The two wizards planned long into the night. They would only have one shot at doing this. If they succeeded, they could alter the course of history forever.

Harry agreed to meet Aberforth the next day near the Shrieking Shack. Aberforth had informed Harry he would reappear in the exact physical location he left their timeline. The Shack would not exist when Voldemort was born so there should be no one around to witness Harry’s arrival. In addition, Aberforth remembered that the location was a meadow so there would be no trees or other items for Harry to hit on his arrival.

Harry spent the last twenty-four hours preparing for his mission. During a trip to Gringotts, Harry removed several million Galleons from his family vaults. Since He would be stuck in the past for twelve years, he would need the money.

Harry also visited many of the shops in Diagon Alley. Harry purchased a new trunk with special Engorgement charms to allow it hold much more than it should without getting heavy. It was also charmed to appear twenty-years out of date and worn. Harry filled the trunk with old-style Muggle and wizard clothing. He casually told the clerks they were for a themed-costume party. Finally, Harry also filled the trunk with a variety of books on magical topics, Muggle and wizard history and law and other topics that caught his interest.

Apparating back to Hagrid's hut, Harry also loaded a variety of his personal items. His Battle Robes that Professor Dumbledore gave him, his father's invisibility cloak, the Marauders' Map to name a few.

Once he was ready, Harry shrank his trunk and placed it into his pocket. Dressed in old-style Muggle clothes, he walked to the Shack to meet Aberforth.

The old wizard was already preparing for the ritual to supercharge the TimeTurner. Harry watched as the old wizard drew a variety of ancient runes on the ground over a two-hour period. Finally, he signaled he was ready.

Harry stepped into the center of the Runes and picked up the TimeTurner.

Aberforth said, "Remember, you will be in the past for exactly twelve years. At twelve years to the second, the magic will snap you back to this location. You can't stop it or hurry it up." At Harry's nod he continued, "The TimeTurner will not appear with you in the past. To prevent it from being lost or damaged it will exist astrally until it recharges. Then it will automatically reactivate and bring you back."

Aberforth looked at Harry and said, "Good luck. Don't let us down."

Harry nodded and said, "I won't. Activate the spell."

Then Harry Potter, The boy-who-lived, the Chosen One, disappeared.

Harry involuntarily blinked as he activated the Time-Turner. It was an automatic reaction to the anticipated results of the activation. Harry did not feel anything with the activation, so he opened his eyes to see what had gone wrong. He found that Aberforth and the Shack were gone.

Harry was standing in a familiar field with the rooftops of Hogsmeade visible over the nearby trees. Harry looked around carefully, but did not see anyone nearby. Harry started to make his way to the village of Hogsmeade.

Harry found that the village of Hogsmeade had not changed much over the last fifty years on the main street. The Three Broom Sticks looked the same. A couple of the smaller shops were different but nothing much else was different. Off the main street, a fair amount of construction was underway. A number of new houses (old to Harry) were being built. Harry did a quick tour through the village and then walked into the Three Broomsticks.

The décor of the Broomsticks had changed somewhat to Harry. It seemed quaint and old-fashioned. Harry figured he would get used to the changes in due time. Harry approached the bar where an old wizard was reading *The Daily Prophet*.

“Good morning, sir,” the barkeep welcomed Harry. “May I get you something on this fine afternoon?”

Harry ordered a light lunch and inquired about a copy of today’s *Prophet*. The barkeep handed a copy of the wizarding paper to Harry and invited Harry to sit at the bar as his lunch was prepared.

Harry sat down and opened the paper. Harry was glad he sat down when he saw the date on the front page of the paper. It was June 16, 1934! Harry missed his target date by seven years! Somewhere in London was a seven-year-old future Dark Lord. Things had just become much more complicated for Harry.

The *Prophet* contained an unusually high mix of Muggle news. The paper was covered quite a bit about activities going on in Germany. As Harry read on he had to fight to contain a groan. Hermione would have smacked him for coming here without doing the proper research first! The Nazi party was in control of Germany now and if Harry remembered his long-ago Muggle history lessons then the build up to World War II would be starting in the next couple of years with the war starting in September 1939. Harry just ended up back in the time preceding the Second World War and he would have to live through it!

Harry now realized why the *Prophet* was reporting on the tensions mounting between Britain and Germany. The Dark Lord Grindelward was a major ally of Hitler. Hitler was fascinated by magic. Grindelward used the Nazi leader as his dupe to attack his magical

opponents. The Diagon Alley was a targeted bombing area of London during the Battle of Britain.

Harry started a small conversation with the barkeep. Harry told the barkeep, named Allen, that he lived in London and was looking to move out away from the city. The barkeep mentioned that the new houses were being sold out of a small realty office down the street. Harry said he would consider it and finished his lunch.

Harry walked out of the Three Broomsticks and looked up towards Hogwarts. This area had been Harry's true home since he was eleven. If Harry was stuck here for the next 10 to 12 years, this was a better place than most to make his home.

Harry walked through the new houses. Since Harry now knew it was a Saturday and no work would be going on. Harry looked around the new construction and was amazed at the methods of magic being used. Almost all of the magic Harry knew dealt with DADA or being an Auror. These houses built by magic seemed more like they were grown than built.

Harry heard footsteps approaching from behind and controlled his instinct to go into a defensive stance. "May I help you, sir?" a light-toned, woman's voice asked.

Harry turned around casually and received another shock of the day. Standing there was Ginny! Harry's heart stopped.

"Are you okay, sir? Are you interested in buying a house?"

Harry shut his jaw and realized this was not Ginny. Although the woman looked a great deal like Ginny, this was not her. Harry guessed the witch was twenty-five or so. Short, like Ginny, the witch had strawberry blonde hair, not the Weasley red.

"I am sorry," Harry stammered. "I thought you were someone else for a moment. Excuse me. I am James Evans and yes I am interested in buying one of these houses."

The young witch smiled. "It is nice to meet you, Mr. Evans. I am Anne Prewett."

Harry wondered if today could get any more screwed up. This was not Ginny standing in front of him, but Harry was willing to bet that it was her grandmother! Harry seemed to remember that Molly Weasley's maiden name was Prewett. Harry briefly wondered if someone out there was having fun making his life more complicated.

(A/N: Yes, as a matter of fact, I am!)

Noticing a wedding ring Harry replied, "It's nice to meet you also, Mrs. Prewett. Can you tell me about these houses?"

Harry spent the next two hours discussing the houses and the different options available. Harry found that Anne Prewett reminded him very strongly of Molly Weasley. If she was not Molly's mother, then there was a very good chance she was a future aunt. She did not treat Harry like an eighteen year-old. Harry figured the haunted look in his eyes and the strain of the last several months added years to his appearance.

Harry told Anne his preplanned story about being raised in a small magical settlement in Australia. He figured this would help cover any questions about accent or modern slang that slipped out. Harry also alluded to time spent in some type of conflict. This would help with any issues with his weary appearance and dark moods.

Harry had to hold in a smile when the house prices were discussed. Harry was used to prices in the 1990's. Prices in the 1930's seemed incredibly low. Harry had withdrawn almost all of the Galleons from his family account. It was enough to live very comfortably in the 1990's for his entire life. At these prices, it was enough for several lifetimes.

Harry selected a pleasant four-bedroom cottage on the outskirts of the village. The house came with the most modern home charms (for the 1930's). Harry figured he could update the charms after he moved in and warded the house. Harry would also have to go shopping for clothing and furniture. He would take a trip to Diagon Alley in the morning to fill those needs.

Harry quickly finished his transaction to purchase the house. Mrs. Prewett efficiently handled her paperwork. Since Harry did not yet

have a vault he would have to visit Gringotts in the morning to open a vault and transfer the Galleons to pay for the house. Saying good-bye to Mrs. Prewitt, Harry apparated to the Leaky Cauldron to rent a room for the night.

The next morning Harry ate breakfast in the Leaky Caldron. It seemed odd to Harry that Tom the Barkeep was not in the taproom. Harry smirked at his own surprise when he realized that Tom was probably not even born yet. The pub was as dark and dingy as ever. Harry considered the fact it had not changed in fifty years.

After eating, Harry walked out into Diagon Alley. Harry gapped at the appearance of the alley. It was packed! Harry had never seen so many witches and wizards in one place before. There was an air of lightness and happiness Harry never felt before in the Alley. The constant Death Eater threat gave the Alley of Harry's time a grim mood. Looking at the number of people in the Alley, Harry also wondered how severely the deaths fighting the Dark Lords had depleted the English Wizarding gene pool.

Making his way to Gringotts, Harry waited in line to open a new vault. After standing in line for an hour, Harry reached the goblin.

"What do you want?" the goblin grunted.

"Good morning. My name is James Evans. I would like to do business with you to enrich both of us. May I ask your name, sir?"

The goblin's expression was shocked. The wizard's polite response was highly unusual. "Grintott is my name. What business would you like to conduct?"

"I would like to open a vault, Mr. Grintott. It will have to be one of your larger vaults."

The goblin's eyes again got bigger. A wealthy wizard was being polite?

"Please step into my office. We will conduct our business in privacy." The goblin hopped off the stool he stood on and led Harry into an

office. Another goblin appeared at the desk to replace the departing Grintott.

Once seated in the office, Grintott asked, "How large a deposit will you be making?"

"19,634,254 Galleons," Harry answered.

The goblin's face took on a gobsmacked expression. A completely unknown wizard wanted to deposit that much money? Who was this wizard, the goblin wondered.

Grintott summoned the paperwork and completed it in short order. Harry's only point of nervousness was when he was asked to provide five drops of blood for identification purposes. Harry knew his grandparents were alive now. It was a risk that his Potter blood would cause a problem.

Fortunately, it did not. If a Potter were to use their blood to search for a any vault they had access to, Harry would have to be dead first. Similarly, Harry could not access the Potter Family vault unless his grandparents and father were also dead. Since that would really mess with history, Harry did not want that to happen.

Harry was amazed then how quickly the rest of his transactions were completed. Within 30 minutes, the vault was setup, a transfer for the cottage was arranged and a spending account was set up. The goblins were extremely polite in their care of Harry. Harry made Grintott his account manager.

Harry taxed his spending account heavily during the rest of his trip through Diagon Alley. Furniture for the four bedrooms, the dining room, kitchen and living room were all purchased. Harry also bought all of the household goods he would need such as sheets, plates, and silverware. Harry figured if he was going to be stuck in this time for ten years, he might as well be comfortable.

Harry also visited Flourish and Botts for a collection of books for his study. Harry had a great many books in his trunk but some could not be displayed since they had not been published yet. Harry also bought a "new" broom and an owl. Harry knew he could not bring his

Firebolt out of his trunk very often so he would need a different broom for everyday flying. Harry felt a particular pain replacing Hedwig. Harry's snowy white owl had been killed a week before Harry's final showdown with Voldemort. Draco Malfoy had not done this to draw Harry out, simply to cause pain to another creature.

With his purchases shrunk into bags, Harry returned to his new cottage in Hogsmeade. The cottage recognized the change in ownership and allowed him immediate access to the house. Harry placed his furniture in its appropriate place and enlarged all of it.

A few hours later, Harry collapsed onto his new couch. Even with magic, setting up a new house from scratch was very hard work. All of the furniture was in place and everything was in its place. Darkness had fallen outside. Hogsmeade was lit up in the very picture of domestic tranquility. The house itself seemed a bit cold. There were no pictures. No reminders of things from the past.

Harry sat on the couch and realized for the first time in his life he had a home of his own. This house and everything in it was his. No Death Eaters were looking for him. No one knew him as The-Boy-Who's-Name-Must-Be-Capitalized-and-Hyphenated. He was completely normal. He had everything he had ever wished for growing up.

Harry Potter felt his emotions clench. Tears built inside his eyes as an ache gripped his heart. Harry's wish had been granted. It only cost him his parents, Sirius, Ginny, Ron, Hermione, Neville, Luna, the rest of the Weasleys and everyone else in his life that ever cared for Harry as a person and not a title.

Something inside Harry broke. Curling up into a fetal position, Harry cried. He cried for the deaths of everyone he had ever loved. Harry cried for the death of 85 of the student body of Hogwarts. Harry cried for the deaths of almost all of the members of the Order of the Phoenix and the Ministry's Auror Corps. In short, Harry cried for the death of his world.

Harry had suffered through grief after the final confrontation with Voldemort. Everywhere Harry looked, he was reminded of the price

he paid for victory. However, here is the warm, snug cottage with normalcy all around him; Harry could not hold it anymore.

A lifetime's worth of pain released at once. The young man with the scarring of an eighty year-old man wept uncontrollably.

Outside a sudden storm shook the village of Hogsmeade. Thunder crashed overhead in an unpredicted storm that came out of nowhere. Many Hogwarts students ran for cover on the Astronomy tower as sudden gusts and strong rains swept the castle. The violence of the storm rattled the windows of the ancient school.

Sitting in his office, Transfiguration Professor Albus Dumbledore watched the storm outside his window. Already seen as the most powerful wizard seen in several generations, Dumbledore could feel the magic flowing through the storm. The professor leaned back in his chair to consider the implications of the storm outside.

After an eternity of tears and pain, Harry passed into unconsciousness. With his sleep, the storm passed also. Emotionally and physically exhausted, Harry slept without dreams for the first time in a long time. It would be over thirty-six hours before he would wake again.

Harry decided to start searching Muggle London the following week. Harry spent four days allowing himself to recover from the incredible release of emotions his first night in his house. Harry forced himself up the first afternoon after waking up to take a shower and change into his new period clothes. Then he collapsed onto his bed for the remainder of the day.

The next couple of days were made with baby steps. Harry started taking small walks through Hogsmeade and shopping in the stores. Harry purchased a variety of small objects to brighten up his home. Many of the shop keeps wondered about the quiet dark haired wizard shopping alone with a sad smile on his face.

The truth was, Harry did not feel alone. As he shopped, he heard the ghost voices of Ginny, Ron and Hermione accompanying him. He heard Ginny getting excited over cute ornaments and decorations. He heard Hermione exhorting him to go by more books to study up on

the time he now found himself. Ron wanted to look at the Quidditch supplies and the “antiques” they offered for sale in Quality Quidditch Supplies.

So the quiet wizard with the sad smile was not really alone. When you have friends that you have laughed and fought with, who loved you and died for you, you are never really ever alone again.

Harry started his search on Monday morning. Harry knew that Tom Riddle was left in a Muggle orphanage in London at his birth. The future Dark Lord was now around seven years old. Although Harry did not like the idea, his mission had not changed. Kill the Dark Lord before he could begin his ascent into power.

Harry found there were sixteen orphanages in London. Since Dumbledore collected the Horcrux stored in the orphanage alone, Harry did not really know which orphanage Riddle would be found at. So Harry resigned himself to searching them all. Time was not really a concern. He would still be stuck in this time for years.

Three days of searching and Harry still had not found any sign of Riddle. Harry was amazed about the number of orphanages and the amount of children each one held. Each one was bigger than Hogwarts with a much smaller staff and budget.

Harry stopped in a small pub for fish and chips. He planned to visit two more orphanages that are possible candidates this afternoon. Harry wanted to get this task out of the way and then spend the next ten or so years in a quiet life.

Leaving the pub, Harry passed an alley and noticed a number of boys gathered towards the other end. They were cheering and excited about something. They were calling out taunts at someone that Harry could not see.

Flashbacks to Dudley and his gang or Slytherins came to Harry's mind. A bad feeling went through Harry as a strong suspicion ran through his head. Hermione called it Harry's “Saving People Thing”. Harry was constitutionally incapable of turning his back on someone he saw in need.

Harry turned down the alley until he was just behind the boys. Harry could see two teenage boys kicking something on the ground to the cheers of the others.

“What is going on here?” Harry yelled.

The boys parted and one of the kickers yelled back, “This doesn’t concern you. Go away!”

Harry could now see a young boy curled up on the ground. He looked at the speaker and quietly but firmly said, “I am taking the boy with me.”

“No way! He is a freak! We are going to teach him a lesson!” At these words of defiance, the surrounding boys joined in jeering at Harry.

The word freak galvanized Harry and raised his anger. His anger caused his magic to spill into his eyes. “I will take the boy with me. Now leave this alley.”

The quiet words carried the threat, no, the promise of swift and painful retribution if he were ignored. Without really understanding why, the boys started to melt away out of the alley.

Harry walked over to the battered form on the ground. Pulling out a kerchief to wipe the blood away, Harry spoke in quiet, comforting tones.

“Relax, no one else is going to hurt you. You are safe.”

A small voice gasped back with a sob, “They always hurt me. They will until I am able to hurt them back. I will show them!”

“Well, they won’t hurt you anymore today. Let me check you out. Just relax.”

Harry did a brief examination of the boy as Madam Pomfrey had taught him and realized the boy probably had a dislocated shoulder and possibly two broken ribs.

"We need to get you to a hospital. I am going to lift you up carefully and take you there. Can you tell me your name?"

The little boy looked up at Harry for the first time. Green eyes met brown as the boy said, "My name is Tommy Riddle."

"My name is Tommy Riddle."

Harry's world rocked with those simple words. Could this beaten young boy be the future Dark Lord and mass murderer? How simple would it be to kill the boy now and complete his mission? So many deaths would be prevented by killing this one little boy. Would it be right to kill this boy?

It was so simple sitting in the Shrieking Shack and discussing killing the infant Riddle. It was so impersonal, so theoretical. Kill one innocent baby. Perform one evil act to prevent thousands. Morally, Harry felt the pull of what was right in both directions.

Lord Voldemort was responsible for the deaths of thousands, including Harry's parents, Ginny, Ron, Hermione, the rest of the Weasleys and Sirius. Tom Riddle killed several people before he even left Hogwarts. Yet, Tommy Riddle had not killed anyone.

Harry subtly drew his wand. "Close your eyes." Harry placed his left hand over the boy's eyes. Then he cast, "*Legilems*"

Harry viewed the images from Tommy's mind. Tommy had been singled out at an early age as a "freak". Harry watched a memory of a young boy talking to a small garden snake. Older boys teased the young boy and one boy stepped on the snake's head to kill it in front of the small boy. Tommy's tears only spurred them on.

Harry pulled back and observed Tommy's magical core. As a seven year-old, it only appeared the size of a golf ball. Voldemort's seemed to be the size of a beach ball. Voldemort's core seemed to be made of black tar, dark and rough. Tommy's core seemed pure. A few streaks of darkness marked the trauma of the abuse, but it seemed to only be on the surface.

Tommy Riddle was not infected by the insanity Voldemort exhibited during both of his wars against the wizarding and Muggle worlds.

Harry considered what this meant. Removed from the beatings and teasing of the orphanage, would Tommy Riddle develop into a responsible, caring individual? Or would the madness raise up on its own as he aged?

Harry thought about the memories Dumbledore showed him during his Sixth year. The interbreeding of previous generations caused his grandfather and uncle to behave in bizarre fashions. Convinced of their superiority due to descent from Slytherin, the Gaunt family lost touch with reality. His mother did not seem to be entirely sane either. Was her use of a love potion on Tom Riddle, Sr. a sign of insanity or total desperation to escape the house of her family? Was their insanity inherited or reinforced by their beliefs?

Harry started to get a headache. Hermione would be able to spout a dozen different psychological theories and research. Harry realized he did not have a clue. Harry's expertise had always been on the practical, not the theoretical side of knowledge.

Harry decided that he did not have enough information at this point to make a proper decision. He could not kill an innocent boy when it may not be necessary. If Harry moved Tommy Riddle to another environment, would his life's path change? Harry needed time to think. A decision could not be made now.

Harry removed his hand and then lifted the boy in his arms. "Relax, Tommy. I will get you fixed up in no time."

A quiet pop sounded in the alley. The two people in the alley had disappeared. Five minutes later, ten boys from the orphanage returned after building up their courage. They really did not understand by they had left their game of Tommy-Taunting behind because of a strange boy. To their surprise, the alley was empty. They looked at each other and wondered the same thought. 'No one came out of the alley, so where did they go?'

Harry and Tommy appeared with a quiet pop in the Apparation Zone in St. Mungo's Hospital. Harry gently set the boy down on a nearby gurney. A medi-witch approached quickly.

"What happened to this boy?"

"I found a bunch of boys beating him up in London. I scared them off and brought him here."

The witch started to scan the boy with her wand. While she was doing that, she asked, "Are you his father? What was he doing wandering around Muggle London on his own?"

Harry shook his head but kept watching. "I am not his father. I stumbled on the scene. I believe he lives in a Muggle orphanage in the area."

"Hmm, he seems to have two cracked ribs, one broken one, and a slight concussion. He is lucky you came along. I will call some orderlies to carry him into the treatment room."

Harry pulled out his wand. "If you would allow me." Harry cast the Levitation Charm and guided the gurney into the treatment room. The medi-witch's eyes grew large at Harry's casual display.

Once in the treatment room, the medi-witch gently woke the boy. "Drink this potion, dear. It will help with the pain."

Tommy slowly raised his head to drink the offered potion. From the expression on his face, he felt about healing potion's taste the same way Harry did. Harry watched as the medi-witch performed a more thorough examination on Tommy. Tommy lay with his eyes closed, ignoring her efforts.

Harry noticed that the medi-witch was not much older than he was. 'She must have just graduated,' Harry thought. Harry also noticed that she was a very attractive woman. Standing around five and a half feet tall she had long blond hair that was up in a bun. While that bun was very functional, it was styled in a alluring way. It was the first time Harry had noticed a woman since Ginny's death.

After Tommy fell back to sleep, the medi-witch turned to Harry. "We will need you to stay around for a bit to answer some questions. Do you know his name?"

Harry sighed internally. He really did not want to be officially noticed by the Ministry. "He told me his name is Tommy Riddle. My name is James Evans."

"It is nice to meet you Mr. Evans. I am Sarah Underhill." She picked up a clipboard and started filling out forms.

"Do you know who his parents are and how to contact them?"

'Yes,' thought Harry. "No, I believe at least his mother is dead. As I said, I just happened onto the scene."

The young witch looked at Harry over his clipboard. "Where are you from, Mr. Evans?"

Harry gave his cover story about just arriving in England. "I recently purchased a cottage in Hogsmeade."

The medi-witch finished filling out her form. She cast a charm on Tommy, then turned back to her clipboard with a sigh. "He is a half-blood."

"Is that a problem?" Harry asked in a neutral tone.

His tone must not have been neutral enough. The medi-witch raised her eyes to look at Harry. "Not to me. However, if he was a pureblood it we could track down family members. Also the Ministry will not pay for his treatment. I don't know how he will be able to pay his bill."

"Only purebloods get free service?" Harry asked. Harry felt his anger rising at the witch's nod. Was it the same in his own time? He had never been billed but was that because of his Chosen One status?

"Place my name down to pay for his treatment. I brought him in. Coming here was not his decision. He would have gone to a Muggle hospital. I don't believe he knows about magic right now."

The medi-witch looked at Harry with surprise in her eyes. (Harry noticed she had beautiful blue eyes.) “Do you realize that means you have just made yourself his magical guardian?”

Harry felt his jaw drop. “I am his what?”

“His magical guardian. You brought a Muggle-raised child into the magical world. Since he has no parents in our world, you just legally accepted responsibility for his magical well-being.”

‘Bugger me,’ Harry thought. This was getting too complex. First he saves the future Voldemort from a beating at the hands of his fellow orphans. Now he just accidentally made himself Riddle’s guardian!

“What does that mean?” Harry asked.

“You accept responsibility for his magical education and behavior until he is seventeen. Didn’t you know?”

“No, I didn’t.”

Harry sat back in his chair and thought about the situation he found himself in. Being Tommy Riddle’s guardian would enable him to observe the boy for any signs of the Darkness that led to Voldemort. If Harry did see any signs it would allow him to act without interference from anyone.

Harry looked up at the beautiful medi-witch that was watching him. “I guess I will have to stick around then and wait until he wakes up. Merlin knows how he is going to respond to all of this!”

The young witch smiled at Harry. “I think you are doing a good thing, Mr. Evans.”

Harry really enjoyed her smile.

Harry looked up from the Daily Prophet and noticed that Tommy was waking up. Setting his paper aside, Harry steeled himself and walked over to the bed. “Good afternoon, Tommy. How are you feeling?”

The boy looked at Harry with a guarded expression. "I am fine, sir. Where am I?"

"Do you remember what happened to you?" Harry asked, avoiding Tommy's question.

Tommy nodded, "Charles and his gang caught me. They hurt me."

"Were you doing something wrong?"

Tommy looked down with downcast eyes. "I stole some food, sir."

Harry said, "Look at me, Tommy." Tommy looked up. "Why did you steal the food?"

"Because they locked me in a closet for a day! I was really hungry! I know I broke the rules! I am sorry! Please don't punish me!"

This hurt Harry. Flashbacks to his own childhood with the Dursleys came unbidden to his mind. Harry crouched down to be eyelevel with the seven year-old. "No one is going to punish you, Tommy. You are in a hospital. I brought you here because you were hurt."

Tommy looked at Harry in surprise. "You saved me?"

Harry nodded. Tommy's innocent expression of surprise that an adult would take his side was painful to see.

"Tommy, I need to tell you some things that will surprise you. Do you believe in magic?"

"No, sir. They don't let us read that stuff in the orphanage."

"Tommy, I want to tell you that magic is real. Some people can use it to do wondrous things. These people are wizards and witches. This is a hospital for magical people. You and I are part of that."

Tommy's face got suspicious. "Are you telling me the truth?"

Harry realized that was almost the same question that 11 year-old Tom Riddle asked Dumbledore, but without the magical push behind it.

“Yes, Tommy, I am. Have you ever had something weird happen that you couldn’t explain?”

Tommy nodded. “I can talk to snakes. The others don’t like that. They call me ‘freak’”.

Harry smiled, “I can talk to snakes also. It is called Parseltongue. Not many wizards have that ability. When I was a little boy, my cousin was chasing me. He was a bully. I suddenly found myself standing on the roof of my school.”

Tommy giggled at the image. “Can you show me some magic?”

Harry pulled out his wand and pointed it at Tommy. Harry cast a Levitation Charm and lifted the shocked seven-year-old over the bed. Harry smiled at the expression on his face.

“I can do that?” he asked after Harry set him back into the bed.

“Yes, after going to a special school for magic.”

“Wow, that would be neat! How do I go to the school?”

Harry sat down and explained to Tommy about going to Hogwarts after he turned eleven and that Harry was now his magical guardian. Tommy seemed shocked that Harry was responsible for him.

“No one ever cared about me. My mother left me by dying when I was born. I don’t know who my father was. Why do you care?”

“Magical law says that since I brought you into our world, I am responsible for you. Normally you would have been informed when you were accepted into Hogwarts. As an orphan, the headmaster would have been your magical guardian.”

Tommy sat and quietly considered all that he had been told. After several minutes he asked, “Would I live with you?”

Harry felt a bit sick at that question. His soul was torn. His head saw the future Dark Lord but his heart heard the same cry he made to

Sirius. Harry asked, "Would you want to? You can still stay at the orphanage."

Tommy looked at Harry with an expression of hatred. "I hate that place! They are mean! I hate them!"

Harry felt Tommy's magic flexing with his surge of emotions. Harry made a quick decision. "Relax, Tommy. I won't make you go back there. You can live with me."

Tommy's face lit up with relief over the news he would not be going back to the orphanage. Tommy started firing a barrage of questions at Harry about where he lived and what it was like to use magic. Although Harry still felt concern over the fate of the boy, for right now, he knew he had made the right choice.

Chapter 2: Changes

The metal-barred doors clanged open with an echo that rang throughout the dormitory. The crash of the door served as an alarm to the 120 boys aged 6-17 that another day at St. Olaf's Orphanage for Boys had begun.

"Get up, you worthless brats!"

Mr. Roughton's rough, alcohol slurred voice echoed down the hall. In small rooms up and down the dormitory halls, boys jumped out of their small, metal framed bunks. It was worth a beating to get caught in your bed when Mr. Roughton passed by. Mr. Roughton felt that a good beating would fix all ills.

Tommy Riddle was one of the smallest boys in the dormitory. Just seven years old, Tommy looked back at his time in the nursery with longing. Mrs. Smithers in the nursery did not emotionally care for her young charges, but she also did not see a reason to make their lives more miserable than they already were.

As one of the smallest boys, Tommy was in the room furthest from both the dining hall and the loos. This meant Tommy usually only got cold water for his showers. Breakfast tended to be whatever remained at the bottom of the gruel pot when he reached the server's station. The larger boys always got first chance at all of the food.

Tommy rolled off the squeaky metal springs and walked to his wardrobe. That was actually a grandiose name for the rickety cabinet. Like everything else, the older boys received the newer furniture. Tommy's wardrobe looked like it was from early in the 19th century. Tommy carefully opened the wardrobe door. (It had a tendency to fall off the hinges if he wasn't careful.) Tommy quickly removed his sleeping clothes and took out his summer uniform. Mr. Roughton was getting closer.

Thirty seconds before Mr. Roughton appeared in the doorway, Tommy and the three boys he shared the room with were dressed and their beds made. Tommy was the smallest of the four seven-year-olds. Mr. Roughton stepped into the room with his large girth

and red face from drink. In his hand he held a short bamboo cane. The cane was his favorite punishment toy.

“Are you brats ready yet? If not, I will have you over the barrel at breakfast!” the fat man yelled.

The four boys stood in motionless silence. Not one boy moved a muscle. Alfred, standing next to Tommy, appeared to have stopped breathing altogether. After a quick glance around, Mr. Roughton sneered at the boys and stormed out of the room.

Tommy heard them enter their neighbor’s room. From the roars coming from the room, the six-year-olds inside had failed to be ready for their keeper’s arrival. Squeals of pain joined the roars as fat man shared his misery with the young boys. A sudden loud thump and the shaking of the thin wall announced the slamming of a young body. After a moment, silence, except for the sobbing of some small boys, returned to the hallway.

Mr. Roughton reappeared in the door to Tommy’s room. None of the four boys in the room had moved from their position lined up next to the door. They had learned Mr. Roughton’s old tricks when they had been six. He added new tricks as the boys aged, but they remembered this one well. After a brief stop, he was gone again.

A call rang out down the hall, signaling breakfast. Tommy lined up in the hall with the others. Three of the six-year-olds from the room next door lined up behind Tommy. Tommy was glad none of them were larger than he was. If they were, he would have been pushed back further in the line. No one asked where the fourth six-year-old was, they all knew better.

The line proceeded slowly down the grungy, dimly lit hall. The old gas lights had long been replaced, but the fixtures remained for the newer electric lights. The dirty gray walls showed the passage of many children until the white walls turned the uniform gray. Pipes for the water and gas heating hung from the ceiling with the occasional pipes leading down to radiators along the hall.

Tommy walked with a blank expression on his face. Showing emotions was too dangerous for a small seven year-old. He hated

this place and everyone he was forced to live with. He hated the fact he was identified as one of them. The boys sorted into two categories, those with power and those without. All of them counted as idiots in Tommy's mind.

The older boys abused and bullied the younger boys to vent their years of frustration from when they were the younger boys. Or, Tommy conceded, they just might not have any other way of relating to each other anymore. The younger boys either sought strength in groups or by ingratiating themselves with older boys. Loners faced a tough road.

Tommy was a loner. The other boys called him a freak. Odd things seemed to always happen around Tommy. Once a group of boys stole his towel and clothes while he was in the shower. Then they killed the water when he had soap in his hair. Tommy reached for his towel to wipe away the sting from his eyes. When he groped for his towel, the other boys taunted him. Tommy let out a shriek for rage. At that moment, all of the water pipes in the showers and sinks exploded in a spray of water.

When Tommy was five, they caught him hissing to his pet snake. Four year-old Tommy found the snake while playing in the garden next to the nursery. The little green snake wanted to get onto a warm rock to heat up. Tommy heard him hissing and picked him up and placed him on the rock. Tommy did not realize that he should not be able to understand the snake. This started Tommy's first and only true friendship in the orphanage.

Tommy named his friend Nagini. (Many years later, Lord Voldemort would name another snake Nagini in tribute to his first friend.) Tommy and Nagini would spend many enjoyable afternoons in the garden talking and sharing confidences. When the London weather became colder, Tommy would often place Nagini inside his pocket or in his wardrobe to stay warm.

When Tommy was around five and a half, he and Nagini were outside enjoying an unusually warm London morning. Tommy talked and giggled as he talked to his friend. A gang of ten to twelve year olds

wandered into the nursery's corner of the garden. Seeing the young boy alone, they quickly started to tease and bully the young boy.

Nagini, seeing his friend threatened, hissed at the boys to leave his friend alone. Noticing the snake, the boys started to poke him with sticks. Realizing the danger, Nagini tried to flee. One boy, named Jason Adams, picked up a large rock and smashed the middle of the green snake. The damage to the snake was fatal, but not immediately.

Tommy pushed his way to his friend, hissing his apologies and grief to his dying friend. The boys taunted Tommy about thinking he could talk to snakes. They left the crying boy to sit with his first friend until death took the snake.

The next day a colder Tommy emerged in the orphanage. Tommy never tried to talk to anyone or make friends. Why should he make friends with people who killed his friend? Nagini was the only one who ever was nice to him. None of the *children* here were worth Nagini's shed skin.

For the next two years, Tommy Riddle went through his life in an island of his own thoughts. Being labeled a freak separated him further from his fellow orphans. His silence and isolation fed the label, making it grow. It also made some of the children start to fear him. Tommy found he could handle their fear.

Behind his cold façade, Tommy sought a friend to replace his long dead Nagini. With each new boy entering the orphanage, Tommy looked for one worthy to be his friend. All too soon though they too heard about the Freak and shunned him. The cold face kept the bullies from coming too close, but inside the boy cried himself to sleep every night.

That morning in the line was like every other one since leaving the nursery. The long, slow line moved down the hall to receive watery gruel and slightly stale bread for breakfast. Mr. Roughton and the staff ate large full breakfasts. Some of the older boys who acted as his assistants (i.e. thugs) also enjoyed the large breakfasts. Tommy really hated the fact the line walked right by their table.

The sound of a spoon scraping on the bottom of a large pot was heard when Tommy was within six feet of the pot. Mrs. Boalregard yelled out that breakfast was all gone. She then lifted the pot and walked away.

The ten orphans left standing in line looked at each other in disbelief. What were they supposed to eat?

“Ha! Serves you right, you little bastards!” Mr. Roughton yelled at them. “Next time, get to breakfast earlier!” The bullies at his table joined in his laughter.

Tommy felt weak with the idea of nothing for breakfast. Bullies had taken almost all of his supper the previous night. Lunch seemed an impossibly long time away for him. The sight of the eggs and sausage on the staff table made it hurt even worse.

Tommy felt a wave of pure rage building up. All he wanted was something to eat! He exploded, “YOU ARE THE BASTARDS! YOU HOG ALL OF THE FOOD!”

The room went quiet. Although many of the boys completely agreed with Tommy, no one had the courage to stand with him.

Mr. Roughton stood and glared down at the small boy. “Well boys, looks like we have our mornings entertainment. Grab him and put him over the barrel!”

Tommy realized then the danger he faced. Two of the older teenage boys approached him from either side. Tommy had no where to run as the other children standing behind him kept him from being able to run out of the room.

The teenagers dragged Tommy over to an empty barrel and laid the boy across it. Leather straps with loops around the ends were placed on his wrists and stretched tight to prevent him from moving. Tommy had seen this before and knew what was coming.

Mr. Roughton strode over to the barrel with a swagger as he held his bamboo cane firmly in his hand. “I think this laddie just earned ten strokes of my cane. Maybe fifteen if I feel like it!”

Tommy shivered at the thought of fifteen strokes of the bamboo cane across his back. He would not be able to move for a week! None of the boys would help him or care what happened to him while he tried to recover.

Tommy closed his eyes and tried to think about anything but the cane. He tried to remember his happiness with Nagini in the garden. The sound of the cane scratching on the barrel brought Tommy's fear rising to the top and his concentration failed.

The first lash blasted across the seven year-olds back with a crack that echoed through the hall. Tommy's scream immediately followed it. The second stroke magnified the pain tenfold. The thin material of Tommy's clothing parted, leaving part of his skin bare to the cane. Tommy felt hot tears burning down his cheeks as the pain flowed through him.

The third and fourth strokes came in quick succession. This was almost a relief. The pain of the third lash masked the arrival of the fourth. The cane was biting deeper into Tommy's skin and blood was starting to flow from the wounds.

The fifth blow was the worst yet. It came in higher on Tommy's back in new territory. More pain erupted through Tommy's body. Tommy started to feel everything going fuzzy. Things started to feel unreal. He waited for the next blow.

The sixth blow did not come. In Tommy's haze, he missed one of the staff coming in to announce that an inspection team from the charity paying the orphanage was currently across the courtyard visiting the girls' orphanage. They would be visiting the boys' side shortly.

Mr. Roughton moved fast. He called for all of the boys to return to their rooms and put on their "inspection clothes". He motioned for two of his assistants to take Tommy away. They knew they were to keep the beaten boy out of sight until after the do-gooders from the charity left.

Two boys dragged Tommy from the dining hall while laughing about the delay in their entertainment. They promised Tommy he would receive his remaining ten strokes instead of lunch today. They really

did not need to taunt the boy. Tommy never heard them. Every motion of his body brought more pain. All Tommy wanted to do was curl up in a ball and not move.

Tommy woke curled in the corner of a closet in the back of the kitchen. From the sunlight coming through the window, it was close to mid-day. Tommy's shirt felt stiff from the drying blood. Tommy carefully sat up and removed the shirt. He gritted his teeth at the pain as the shirt pulled at his wounds where the blood already dried.

Tommy gingerly rose to his feet and braced himself against the wall. Tommy looked around the small closet for anything to use as a replacement shirt. Finding nothing, Tommy left his old shirt behind and opened the closet door. He could hear Mr. Roughton's voice booming in a jovial sound only heard during inspections. That meant someone from the charity was in the building.

Creeping out of the closet, Tommy looked around the kitchen for something to eat and a shirt to wear. Hanging near the door was one of the cook's shirts. Tommy stood on a stool to get it down and carefully pulled it over his thin frame. It was made of a heavy fabric and it hurt where it touched the wounds on his back.

Tommy opened the large walk-in refrigerator and stopped dead in his tracks. It was filled with all kinds of meats and other food. His stomach gripped him as he realized food was so close. Tommy found an area filled with leftovers sausages from that morning's breakfast. He eagerly tore open the paper wrappings and crammed the taste of Heaven into his mouth. He ate quickly, knowing he could be caught at any moment, ending his feast.

The seven-year-old started to feel slightly nauseous from the food. After so long with no food, his body could not handle the sudden feast. Shoving a last few sausages into his pockets, Tommy started to make his way out of the kitchen.

"You boy! What do you think you are doing!"

It was the cook. Tommy ran. It was the only thing he could do really. The boy ran out into the courtyard separating the two wings of the orphanage. Normally the gate was locked but it was left open due to

the inspection. As Tommy ran into the courtyard he heard the cook calling for Mr. Roughton. Now the inspectors would hear about this also. Tommy turned in the courtyard and ran out of the orphanage and into the street.

His back burned with each stride as Tommy ran down the street. He knew it was only a matter of time before the older boys were set loose to find him. He had to find a place to hide.

Tommy ran down an alley and slumped down between some rubbish bins. He could not run any further. The pain from his back was excorticating. His body was not used to running flat out for extended periods of time and had very little energy to start with. The little boy sat taking in great gulps of air. He knew he had to move soon. Although he had the will, his body failed to respond.

He was never sure how long he sat in the alley before the boys found him. Suddenly the rubbish bins were yanked aside, revealing a number of the older boys. Tommy recognized their leader as Charles Mahoney, one of Mr. Roughton's assistants.

"Did you think you could get away with making Mr. Roughton look bad?" Mahoney yelled. "Haven't you learned your lesson?"

A swift kick to his side punctuated these questions. Tommy grabbed his ribs and tried to roll away from the new source of pain. Mahoney simply stepped up and delivered another kick. This one was to the already damaged back of the young boy. At least one other boy joined Mahoney in raining blows down on the defenseless child.

The blows suddenly stopped. Tommy could not understand why. He certainly could not stop the other boys.

Then he gasped in pain as he was rolled over onto slightly. He heard a man's voice tell him he would be safe. Tommy told the voice he would never be safe. Then the voice asked for his name. He thought he answered but then for the second time that day, Tommy Riddle lost consciousness.

Tommy woke in the most comfortable bed he had ever been in. The soft sheets felt good against his skin. Tommy noticed he also felt no

real pain. A couple of twinges but nothing aside from that. Tommy knew he should be feeling a lot of pain right now. Maybe he was dead. Then he could be with his parents. That thought brought him some comfort.

From the sounds around him, Tommy realized he was not dead. Tommy slowly opened his eyes and looked around the room. It was brightly lit and clean. This was definitely not the orphanage. A man sat in the corner reading a newspaper. Tommy couldn't be sure but it seemed a little odd.

The man set down the paper and smiled at Tommy. He had messy black hair and brilliant green eyes. His eyes seemed a haunted when he looked at Tommy. For a seven-year-old, he had seen that look a lot. Mostly on the boys coming in who had just lost their parents.

The man introduced himself as James Evans. After a couple of questions about what happened, the man told Tommy he was the one who saved Tommy in the alley. Tommy was surprised someone had stepped in for him and thanked the man. Something held Tommy back. Mr. Evans had a strange pain on his face whenever he looked at Tommy. It was not guilt but something the young boy could not place.

Then Mr. Evans asked a very surprising question, did Tommy Riddle believe in magic?

The next hour was the most incredible time of Tommy's life. He was not a Freak! He was a Wizard! He could learn to do the wonderful tricks that Mr. Evans showed him with his magic wand. Mr. Evans even said that he could talk to snakes too! There were people like him! He wasn't alone anymore.

Tommy enjoyed hearing about his new school when he was older. Hogwarts sounded like a fantastic place. Mr. Evans told Tommy about flying around on brooms, meeting unicorns, and learning to cast spells. It sounded wonderful. Tommy could tell Mr. Evans really liked to fly. The haunted look left his face while he told Tommy about broomstick flying and a game called Quidditch..

Mr. Evans revealed a huge shock during their conversation. Because Mr. Evans saved him and brought Tommy to a magical hospital, Mr. Evans was now Tommy's magical guardian. This brought dual emotional surges to Tommy. Hope and fear. Hope that he would be able to leave the orphanage and fear that this magical world would disappear when he returned to that horrible place.

Tommy carefully asked Mr. Evans if he would live with him. Tommy was still nervous about this strange new man who was a wizard. But he seemed nice and Tommy did not get feeling of falseness he had seen from Mr. Roughton.

Tommy started to panic when Mr. Evans said he could still live at the orphanage. Tommy started to yell his hatred about everything to do with that place. Mr. Evans placed a gently hand on Tommy's arm and told him he could live with him.

It was the happiest moment of young Tommy Riddle's life.

The next five days went in a whirlwind for Tommy. Mr. Evans told Tommy he needed to stay in the hospital, called St. Mungos, for his injuries and to treat his malnutrition. Tommy did not know what malnutrition meant, but he did know he never ate so well in his life.

Mr. Evans left late in the day and said he would return for lunch the next day. A pretty lady named Miss Underhill looked after Tommy. Tommy liked her bright smile. He did not like the vile things she made him drink. Miss Underhill talked to Tommy about his time in the orphanage and his rescue by Mr. Evans. She seemed relieved that Mr. Evans was taking Tommy away from that life. Tommy added her as the second person he felt maybe a worthwhile human being.

Mr. Evans returned on the second day at lunch just as he said. Tommy noticed that Miss Underhill gave Mr. Evans a very bright smile when he walked into the room. Mr. Evans did not seem to notice. He handed Tommy a piece of paper with official-looking writing on it. Tommy could only read a couple of the words.

"This is your release from the orphanage into my custody, Tommy," Mr. Evans told him. "When you are ready to leave here, you will come with me to my home in Hogsmeade."

Now Tommy was really excited. It was all coming true. "When can I leave, sir?"

Mr. Evans smiled and glanced at Miss Underhill, then back at Tommy. "As soon as Miss Underhill feels you are up to it and can be released. I have a feeling though that I may be stealing her favorite patient."

Miss Underhill smiled. "Indeed you will. But I know Tommy would like to see his new home. Still, you need to stay here at least four more days to allow the potions time to work and your body to catch up to where it is supposed to be."

Tommy felt crestfallen that he would have to stay so long. He really wanted to see his new home. He liked Miss Underhill and the hospital bed was the most comfortable ever, but Tommy discovered he really did not like being in a hospital.

"Don't worry, Tommy." Mr. Evans said with a smile. "This will give me a chance to get your room setup and get some additional supplies in the house."

The idea that he would have his own room brought a smile to Tommy's face.

Tommy stood in front of a large fireplace in the main entry hall of St. Mungos. Miss Underhill had walked Tommy and Mr. Evans down to see them leave. Tommy felt a little nervous to be going to his new house. What was going to happen next.

Miss Underhill read the fear in Tommy's face. She bent down and kissed the boy on the cheek. She whispered into his ear, "Relax. I will come visit in a couple of days. Everything will be okay."

Tommy smiled shyly at her. He hated the fact she could read him so easily. No one at the orphanage had ever been able to guess his thoughts.

Tommy looked up at Mr. Evans. He still had a haunted look around his eyes. It was usually worse when he looked at Tommy. Tommy could not understand. What had he done to hurt Mr. Evans? He could

tell Mr. Evans was fighting to hide his pain. Tommy resolved to help the man who helped him so much already.

Mr. Evans smiled and said, "I think you have an admirer Tommy. Miss Underhill, you are welcome to visit anytime."

He handed Tommy a small pinch of dust. He told Tommy this is called a Floo. Mr. Evans threw a pinch into the fire. The fire turned green. Mr. Evans stepped into it and said, "The Den" and disappeared.

Tommy turned to Miss Underhill in an excited voice, "That was the wickedest thing I've ever seen!"

She smiled at Tommy and hugged him good-bye. Then Tommy stepped into the fire and was gone.

Sarah Underhill stood at the fire and looked at it for a couple of minutes before walking back to her ward. She thought about the young man and boy who had just left. Tommy was adorable and sweet but seemed damaged by his time in the Muggle orphanage. James Evans seemed to carry his own baggage with him. They seemed connected in some uniquely personal way. At first, she thought Mr. Evans was really Tommy's father. Then realized he would have been twelve when Tommy was born. He was actually two years younger than her!

Deciding she would visit on her next day off, Miss Underhill returned to her duties. Thoughts of a pair of bright green eyes hovering in the back of her mind.

A/N: The picture of Riddle in the orphanage is different than the one presented to Harry in HBP. That Riddle was 11 and had four more years in the orphanage. Seven year-old Riddle had not yet discovered his powers and truly started manipulating people. The signs are in the version presented here, but they are not yet developed. (However, they may...)

SaWa-San presented an interesting question in a review, will Harry return 10-12 years older the moments after he left or the same age as when he left? "It would mean, a 28/30 year old

Harry James Potter, that might not even be the BWL with no memory of how he grew up in the changed timeline, will return?"

The answer is Harry never asked and Aberforth never volunteered the information. (I think the Dumbledores have an allergy to freely sharing information.) Another question is with the changing timelines, will Harry every be born?

Also I want to acknowledge in adavance that many of my word choices and spellings are in American English. I try not to use to many but sometimes they slip through. Since this is also a "period" piece, even the British slang would have changed from the 1930's. Please worry more about the intent of the characters' words, rather than the purity of the word choice and accents.

Chapter 3: Stepping Out of the Fire

Harry / James POV

Harry stumbled out of the Floo and rolled onto the floor. He had still never gotten the hang of using the damn thing. The fire flared green briefly and Tommy came flying out to slam into Harry.

“I hate taking the Floo!” Harry said with a groan as he pushed himself up.

Tommy sat up and shook his head to clear it. “Why did it do that?”

Harry smiled slightly, “Most people don’t have a problem with it. They still out as neat as you please. Ron used to... err, my friends used to laugh at me because it always threw me out. I guess it does the same to you.”

Harry felt a pang when he mentioned Ron. Talking about his dead best friend was still very difficult. It was especially difficult to talk about him with the child-self of the man who killed Ron.

The last week had been difficult on many levels to Harry. None of this was what Aberforth and he planned before he had come back. The plan had been simple. Come back, kill baby Riddle and then hide out for the next ten to twelve years until the Time Turner recharged. Harry had heard a Muggle term that described this situation, FUBAR. Of course the acronym’s companion, SNAFU, described his whole life.

For the last week, Harry had run around to various agencies to clear the roadblocks to Tommy’s arrival here today. Although Wizarding law made Harry Tommy’s magical guardian, the law assumed that the adult witch or wizard was a recognized member of the magical community of Britain. Since Harry was not so recognized (at least not for another forty-seven years until he was born!), he needed to become registered with the Ministry.

Harry should have known that anything dealing with the Ministry of Magic would become a colossal headache. As an alien Wizard with no family ties, the bureaucrats saw him as their natural prey. Since Harry could not provide them with copies of his school records, they

labeled him as an untrained wizard. Then they tried to provide *him* with a guardian! Harry actually found himself missing his “The-Boy-Who-Lived” status. He had never had to deal with this before.

Harry finally was able to work out a meeting that included Madam Marchbanks. Harry had remembered her mentioning that she had tested Dumbledore for his NEWTS. Harry explained that he had recently moved back to Scotland after living abroad most of his life. Since he was not trained in the magical British education system, he did not have the documents they required. Harry further explained to the old witch the circumstances surrounding his magical guardianship of Tommy.

The situation appalled Madam Marchbanks. She completely understood Harry/James’ situation. Harry’s report of the conditions Tommy lived in left her speechless.

Madam Marchbanks quickly arranged for Harry to skip the OWLS session the bureaucrats had been trying to schedule for Harry for in August. As a long-time examiner, she was able to pull together a team of examiners for a special exam session. Harry had to pay for their time on top of the Ministry fees but that did not concern Harry. The cost did not even make a dent in his Gringotts account.

Harry arranged to take his NEWTS in DADA, Potions, Transfiguration, Charms, and Astronomy. He also decided to take his OWLS in Care of Magical Creatures, Herbology, Arithmacy and History of Magic. Harry knew he did not need to take that many exams to answer the bureaucrats’ requirements, but he wanted to get them out of the way. If he decided to work in this time, he did not want to have to do this again.

The only two exams he had any qualms about were Arithmacy and History of Magic. After the end of his Sixth year, Harry had started de-facto studying Arithmacy during his research in how to defeat Voldemort. Hermione started teaching Harry that summer at his Aunt Petunia’s house. Math was Harry’s favorite subject prior to attending Hogwarts. Harry found the subject interesting and continued to read on it during his free time.

History of Magic was another story. Harry struggled to get his “A” on his first OWL. He had not touched a history text since then. That was more than three years ago. Harry was going to need time to refresh his knowledge of history and update himself on “current” events.

Aside from the Ministry issues, Harry had many other arrangements to make. Miss Underhill provided Harry with an estimate of Tommy’s sizes for clothing. Harry shopped in Diagon Alley for wizard clothing for the seven year-old. He also picked up a child-sized broom. The broom allowed the adult to adjust the maximum height and speed the child could fly. Harry idly wondered if Tommy Riddle would be a good Quidditch player.

Harry also picked up a selection of books on magical parenting and education. Harry knew that the Weasley kids had been home schooled by Molly. Harry realized he had no idea how the remainder of the magical community trained their children before they were allowed to start studying magic.

Harry went shopping in the Muggle part of London also. Muggle clothing and children’s games joined books on Muggle school topics, like math and science.

Harry found walking around Muggle London to be an interesting experience. In his own time, exploring London was too dangerous for Harry. The concern that Death Eaters would attack him prevented him from seeing the sights or attending any events in the open. Although the nightlife was much more subdued than he had heard from other Hogwarts students, Harry enjoyed walking free and seeing what he could of the city.

Harry wished his visit to the orphanage had been as pleasant as his time in the rest of the city.

flashback

Harry arrived at the gates to the orphanage at 8:30 in the morning two days after rescuing Tommy from the alley. The delay was due to his initial skirmishes with the Ministry over his guardianship.

Walking through the gates, Harry observed the young girls playing in the courtyard. They seemed relatively happy and well fed. Harry did not see any of the abuse Tommy talked about at St. Mungos

Harry knocked on the office door with the sign for the boys' wing. After knocking twice more, the door was opened by a surely young man who scowled at Harry.

"What do you want, git?"

Harry tried to be polite, "Good morning, my name is James Evans. I would like to speak to Mr. Roughton."

"He don't have time to talk to every joey off the street. Go away," was the reply. Then the boy started to shut the door.

Harry stuck his foot in the door before the door shut. The boy opened the door with anger on his face.

"You are asking for it kid! Get lost or I'll kick your arse!"

Harry looked at the boy and allowed some of his magic to flicker in his eyes. "You will take me to Mr. Roughton or you can wait here."

The young thug paused for a second. This joey seemed different. A thread of fear bubbled up into that little used organ he called a brain. Unfortunately, that organ had atrophied from neglect. The young thug (named Randolph) fell back on instinct. He threw a punch.

During his training after Dumbledore's death, Moody brought in a pair of Squibs to train Harry in physical combat. Both Squibs were retired Royal Marine sergeants. One had been the Light Heavyweight fighting champion of the Atlantic fleet for four years. The other spent most of his career stationed in the Far East where he studied several different forms of martial arts. Harry consumed many healing potions during his time with the two men.

Harry stepped out of the way of the obvious punch and gripped the thug's wrist in a simple hold. With no advanced technique, Harry simply allowed the thug's own momentum and mass to follow through.

The next thing Randolph knew was waking up on the cobblestones outside the office and James Evans nowhere in sight.

Harry walked into the office of the boys' orphanage wondering if the unconscious thug was a relative of Crabbe or Goyle. Setting the thought aside, Harry proceeded out of the empty office and into an inside hallway.

Once past the office, the halls seemed dark and grimy. The walls had obviously not been painted or cleaned in years. Litter and other rubbish lay strewn on the floor, simply dropped wherever the user no longer need them.

Harry could hear voices and the sounds of voices coming from up ahead. Reaching a pair of doors marked "Dining Hall", Harry paused outside the door. A man's voice hollered from inside.

"You whelps will wait until I am finished eating. One of you defied me and now you all pay the price! Be thankful that I only made it two days with no food! All you had to do was bring the little bastard back here! But since you idiots couldn't do that you all share his punishment!"

Harry was shocked by this confirmation of the abuse in the orphanage. As a child locked in the cupboard, Harry would often wish that the Dursleys would simply leave him at an orphanage. Harry realized that if the rest of Tommy's story proved out, this place made the Dursleys seem perfect parents.

Harry had to think quickly. He was not allowed to use magic on the Muggle. Spending ten to twelve years in Azkaban was not on Harry's plan. Too bad the British Navy no longer used press gangs! Sending Mr. Roughton off on a navy man-of-war from a century ago seemed like a great idea.

Harry cast a set of charms on himself to alter his appearance. He now looked to be in his fortys with a brutish, nasty face. He used Goyle Sr. as his model. Once the charms were set, Harry pushed through the doors.

"Ah, Mr. Roughton. Still at the table I see," Harry sneered.

“Who are you?” the fat man at the table roared.

“I am the man with a business proposition for you. Would you be interested in making a lot of money, Mr. Roughton?”

The man’s pig eyes bulged at the idea of making money. In an instant, his manner changed, “Of course! Why don’t we step into my office while we discuss your offer?”

Harry stepped aside and said with a sneer, “After you, sir.”

On the short walk to the office, Harry cast Legilems on the fat bully. Harry confirmed everything Tommy told him about this place and more. Alfred Roughton used the orphanage to line his own pockets. He skimmed for the budget for food and supplies. He also cut the boys’ allowed portions by a third to cover that fact. He used the boys and girls from the other wing as his playthings for his nighttime activities. After breaking them, he sold them to others of similar interest. He also sold untouched children to those “adopting” them for this purpose. The paperwork went unfiled so no trace of the child was possible. Harry felt disgusted by the thoughts in the man’s head. Then Harry made a fascinating discovery. Alfred Roughton was a wizard.

Roughton was a very weak wizard, almost a Squib. His lack of power and lazy wand work coupled with his bullying prevented him from finishing his First year at Hogwarts. He had been sorted into Gryffindor almost by default. Not because he was particularly brave, but because he completely lacked any of the qualities the other houses looked for; no brains for Ravenclaw, no loyalty and hard work for Hufflepuff, and no ambition for Slytherin. The Gryffindor Head of House initiated his expulsion before the Christmas break. It was not that Roughton came from a bad home life; he was simply a psychopath with no regard for others.

This placed the situation in an entirely new light. Harry silently drew his wand and cast a stunner as they walked into the office. The fat man dropped to the floor in a boneless heap. A quick search turned up the wizard’s wand. Placing it in his pocket, Harry looked through the desk and found a small tin with Floo powder. Harry dropped the charms on himself to revert to his normal appearance.

Harry light the fire with a quick Incendio and then threw some powder into the fire. Harry called out, "Auror Command"

The head of a young man soon appeared in the fire and asked, "May I assist you?"

Harry replied, "Yes, I would like to report a wizard abusing Muggle and magical children under his control. This includes the sale of some children."

The young man in the fire blanched at this news. "He is a wizard? Are you sure?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, I have recovered his wand and this Floo connection is from his office."

The young man grimaced, "We will have a team there shortly. Please clear the space in front of the fire."

Harry stepped back and waited for the Aurors. He wondered how this development would affect Tommy. Harry figured it was obvious Voldemort's hatred of Muggles came from his time here. What would he do now that a wizard was known to be behind it?

Before Harry could reach any conclusions, two wizards and a witch appeared in the office from the Floo. Harry noticed one of them was the young man he had talked to already.

The older wizard looked at Harry. "You are the one who called us in?"

"Yes, I was investigating some claims made by a young boy about this place. I was surprised to find a wizard was running it. That made it your issue instead of the Muggle police."

The witch asked, "And who would you be?"

Harry smiled, "I am James Evans. I just returned from abroad and have bought a house in Hogsmeade."

The wizard said, "I am Auror Franklin." Then he indicated the witch and young wizard and said, "This is my partner, Auror Gryfryder, and this is Auror-trainee Moody."

Harry was shocked by the name. This was the young Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody? He looked so... normal.

Moody rolled the unconscious fat wizard over and then looked back at his trainers. "Sir, I think this is Alfred Roughton."

"Bloody hell! Is this where the bastard has been hiding out?" the older wizard spat out.

Harry gave them an inquisitive look. "This means something to you?"

The witch grimaced at Harry. "We have been looking for this git for three years. He was convicted for robbery and murder of an elderly witch. He escaped because of an accident in the paperwork before he could be sent to Azkaban."

Harry felt a combination of relief and shock. He felt relief because the matter should be cleared up quickly. As a convicted escapee, Roughton should receive a quick trial followed by an even quicker trip to visit the Dementors. The shock was because the idea that one paperwork error could have created the circumstances for Tommy's destroyed childhood.

end flashback

Before Harry had even taken his exams, Alfred Roughton was sent off to Azkaban for a life sentence. Harry felt a large degree of frustration that the charges for the events in the orphanage were never heard in the Wizengamot. It was felt that the additional charges were a waste of time since the victims were Muggle children. Harry contained his anger by concentrating on the fact that Tommy had been kept out of the issue.

Harry approached the charity running the orphanage the next day. Harry offered to buy the orphanage and take over running it. Although the charity was shocked at the offer, they agreed. The board had been shocked at the "disappearance" of Roughton. An audit showed

that he had disappeared with stolen funds. The board did agree to also continue running the orphanage while “James” assembled a staff and plan. Harry amused himself by naming his new “charity” the Phoenix Foundation.

While waiting for his exam grades, Harry spoke to Madam Marchbanks about magical and Squib educators. She seemed very interested in Harry’s project.

“Why do you want magical educators, Mr. Evans? It is a Muggle orphanage,” she asked.

“I was an orphan myself. My new ward is one. Both of us are considered half-bloods. My father was pure-blood but from a small family with no close relatives. My mother was a Muggle-born witch with only a Muggle sister who hated magic. Tommy’s mother died with no indication of who her family was. He ended up in a Muggle orphanage. We need someplace safe for these children to go.”

Madam Marchbanks was getting excited listening to Harry speak. “That seems like a wonderful idea! I had never thought of that problem before.” The tiny, old witch paused for a moment. “What about the Muggle children already there?”

Harry shrugged, “They can stay. I intend to make sure that both a magical and Muggle education is provided for the magical children. Squibs and Muggle children will get some a purely Muggle education but develop an understanding of the magical world.”

“I think that would be a wonderful idea. I will give you my full support. I can get you a list of qualified teachers and caregivers. I also sit on the Wizengamot. I’ll make sure nothing blocks you there also.”

“I would greatly appreciate that, Madam Marchbanks.”

“It will be my pleasure, Mr. Evans.” The witch smiled at him, “May I also say I am impressed with your performance on your exams over the last two days. I have seen many Aurors that have less ability in DADA then you have shown here.”

Harry felt a flicker of concern as he felt the old examiners curiosity. How did Harry explain he received all of the Auror and Unspeakable training sixty-five years in the future? The only things they skipped was the paperwork and other administrative issues.

Before Harry could answer, an owl flew in and dropped a letter on the desk. Then it flew away. It also dropped something else before it flew away.

Madam Marchbanks sighed. "We need to find another way of sending letters within the Ministry. Owls make too much of a mess."

Harry chuckled thinking of Mr. Weasley telling Harry about why they changed over to charmed paper airplanes sixty years from now. He watched while she read the letter.

"Well Mr. Evans, these are very good scores. Especially for someone home schooled outside the country." Then she handed Harry the letter.

Harry skipped all of the preliminary stuff and jumped straight to the scores.

NEWTS

Charms: EE

DADA: O ()

Potions: EE

Transfiguration: O

Astronomy: A

NEWTS: 5/5 with Honors in DADA

OWLS

Arthimacy: EE

Care of Magical Creatures: O

Herbology: EE

History of Magic: A

OWLS: 9/9 (NEWTS taken count for OWL level also)

'Wow,' thought Harry. 'That is better than I did originally. I guess not taking them during war time makes a difference.'

Madam Marchbanks reached her hand across the desk. "Congratulations, Mr. Evans. I believe that the last hurdle in your guardianship of Tommy Riddle has now been removed."

Harry took her hand and looked her in the eye. "Thank you, Madam Marchbanks. You have no idea how much this means to me."

Harry came out of his memories and looked across the floor at the young boy who had landed next to him on the floor. Harry grinned at the disbelieving expression on Tommy's face.

Tommy looked at Harry with big eyes and said, "That was neat! Can we do it again?"

Harry felt his grin grow wider. "So, you like that did you? Wait till you try out a broom!"

Harry could see the boy's imagination going into overload. "Would you like to see your room?"

Tommy seemed like he was in a stunned disbelief walking through the house towards the bedrooms. Harry indicated the first bedroom door and stepped aside for Tommy to lead the way into the room.

Harry laughed as the boy looked around the room in disbelief. "Is this all for me?" When Harry nodded, Tommy said, "This is bigger than the room I shared with three other boys!"

Tommy opened the wardrobe and gasped at the clothing hanging there. Then he saw a child-sized broom hanging on hooks in the corner. "Is this a real flying broom?"

"It is a starter broom. It won't let you do anything too dangerous until you get the hang of it."

"What is in there?" Tommy asked pointing to a door in the far wall.

"It leads to your bathroom. It connects to the guest bedroom on the other side," Harry told him.

Tommy turned to Harry with an odd expression on his face. It was the same cold expression Harry had seen on the faces of many of the other boys at the orphanage. "Why are you doing this? What do you want?"

For the first time, Harry could see the 16 year-old Tom Riddle he had met in the Chamber of Secrets. The same cold expression that Malfoy and the other Death Eater want-to-be's in Slytherin house when Harry was at Hogwarts adopted.

Harry looked at the 7 year-old with the expression of a old and cold man. "Come into the kitchen and we will talk. I will explain some things to you about why I helped you and took you in."

All too shortly for Harry's mind, he was sitting in the kitchen with a glass up butterbeer in front of him. Tommy had a glass of pumpkin juice in front of him. He glanced at it a little warily.

"Tommy, I have to tell you a story. It is not very pleasant, but I think you will understand. Stop me if you want or have questions. Okay?"

Tommy solemnly nodded without saying anything.

Harry started, "When I was born an evil wizard was seeking power. He killed and hurt many people. My parents fought against him with a number of other people. One night he and some of his followers came to my parents' house and killed them. He was hurt while at my house and lost much of his power. He fled and was not seen again for more then ten years."

Tommy's eyes showed a deep interest in the story. "How did he get hurt?"

Harry did not want to share too much information. After all, Tommy was only seven. No need to scare him. Also if history repeated itself, Harry did not want Voldemort forewarned. "The answer to that is not simple, Tommy. How he got hurt is not important right now. The important thing is he did get hurt and flee."

Tommy nodded. Harry was tempted to chuckle at his expression. Hermione got a similar one when she had a mystery to solve.

"My grandparents on both sides had already died. I only had my mother's sister. I was taken to live with her, my uncle and my cousin when I was only one."

"At least you didn't have to live in an orphanage," Tommy muttered.

"Don't be too quick to judge. My aunt and her family hated magic. They were Muggles. They called people with magic 'freaks'. When the boys beating you up called you a 'freak' it is what caused me to stop. I don't like bullies."

Harry looked out the kitchen window for a moment and continued. "They made me live in the cupboard under the stairs for ten years. My aunt and uncle yelled at me constantly. They never showed any affection. My cousin and his friends had a game called 'Harry Hunting'. Once they caught me, they would beat me up."

Tommy asked in a quiet voice, "When did they stop?"

Harry smirked unconsciously. "When I was eleven, I started learning magic. I was not allowed to use it at home but I made friends who protected me until I could protect myself."

Tommy looked at Harry in the eyes. "Is that all true?"

Harry could feel a slight pull. It was not enough to make even a Muggle tell the truth if they did not want to, but it was the beginning of a natural Legilimens. "Yes, Tommy. It is the truth. I simplified much but that was my life with my aunt and uncle. Do you understand now why I could understand your situation?"

Tommy nodded. He seemed relieved to hear the story Harry thought.

"I don't like Muggles," Tommy said. "They treated both of us wrong because we can use magic."

This statement made Harry very nervous.

"People are people, Tommy. It doesn't matter if they are Muggle or magical. Remember, it was a wizard who killed my parents because they would not serve him."

Tommy looked down at the table. Harry hated to add this next part. "Tommy, this is true in your own situation, too."

Tommy looked up in surprise. "Did a wizard kill my parents?"

Harry shook his head. "No, Tommy. I am not sure what happened to your father, but your mother died when you were born. She was sick and gave her energy to making sure you lived."

"If...if she was a witch would she have lived?" Tommy asked in a small voice.

"She was a witch, Tommy. You inherited your magic from her."

Tommy seemed to brighten a bit from this news. "Then what are you talking about a wizard ruining my life?"

"Tommy, there were two magical beings at the orphanage. You were one and Mr. Roughton was the other."

Tommy's eyes started to water. "Then why would he call me freak?"

Harry reached across the table and lightly held Tommy's hand. "He is in jail now, Tommy. He was hiding from the Aurors, the wizard police. Maybe you reminded him of what he had lost in his darkness."

"Tommy, I have met good and bad Muggles, just like I have met good and bad wizards. It is not the power that makes one different, but what we do with it. Do you understand?"

A tear ran down Tommy's cheek. "Yes, I understand."

Harry stepped around the table and took the little boy into his arms. Tommy cried for a while. Then he leaned back and looked up at Harry.

“What should I call you?”

Harry smiled. “Well, Mr. Evans is too formal. How about Uncle James?”

Tommy smiled, his eyes still red from crying. He put his arms around Harry in a hug and said, “Thanks, Uncle Jimmy!”

Tommy's POV

Tommy felt nervous as he zipped through the Floo. The trip made him nauseous. Then it ejected him out and he crashed onto the floor and slid into someone else. Tommy sat still for a moment to allow the room to stop spinning.

When he sat up, Tommy realized the object he ran into coming out of the Floo was in fact Mr. Evans. Tommy heard Mr. Evans mutter, “I hate taking the Floo!”

Tommy sat up and shook his head to clear it. “Why did it do that?”

Mr. Evans smiled slightly, “Most people don't have a problem with it. They still out as neat as you please. Ron used to... err, my friends used to laugh at me because it always threw me out. I guess it does the same to you.”

Tommy noticed a grim sadness when Mr. Evans mentioned his friend. The man sat there for a moment in silence, as he seemed lost in thought. Tommy did not understand Mr. Evans. Tommy knew from his time at the orphanage that people always wanted something for whatever they did. No one ever did anything simply to be “nice”.

Tommy noticed Mr. Evans was paying attention to him again. He looked at Mr. Evans with big eyes and said, “That was neat! Can we do it again?”

Mr. Evans's grin grew wider. "So, you like that did you? Wait till you try out a broom!"

Tommy could tell that Mr. Evans liked the thought of riding a broom. This man really confused him. He seemed to be nice but Tommy kept catching something in his eyes that concerned the boy in a way the seven-year-old could not express.

Mr. Evans stood up and offer Tommy a hand to get up. "Would you like to see your room?"

Tommy followed Mr. Evans through the house. Everything in the house seemed to be new. All of the furniture had a newness to them that made Tommy think they had just been bought. The house was neat but at the same time gave Tommy a comfortable feeling.

Mr. Evans led Tommy to a doorway and indicated for Tommy to enter the room. Tommy walked into a room that was larger then his dorm room at the orphanage. The furniture in the room had the same newness as the rest of the house Tommy had seen. The bed seemed huge. It had four posts on the corned and a canopy over it. A nice desk sized for a child sat in the corner with a bookcase next to it filled with various books.

Tommy heard Mr. Evans laugh. Tommy looked at the strange man and asked, "Is this all for me?" Mr. Evans nodded. "This is bigger then the room I shared with three other boys!"

Tommy opened the wardrobe and gasped at the clothing hanging there. There were more clothes hanging in the wardrobe then Tommy had owned in his entire life. Brand new clothes no one had ever worn before hung on neat hangers. Tommy saw normal clothes hanging next to the types of robes that he had seen some wizards wearing at the magical hospital. Then he saw a child-sized broom hanging on hooks in the corner. "Is this a real flying broom?"

"It is a starter broom. It won't let you do anything too dangerous until you get the hang of it."

"What is in there?" Tommy asked pointing to a door in the far wall.

"It leads to your bathroom. It connects to the guest bedroom on the other side," Harry told him.

Tommy's instincts were screaming at him. This man wanted something from Tommy. He had heard rumors in the orphanage about some of the men who had taken kids away from the orphanage. Reaching a sudden decision, Tommy turned and glared at Mr. Evans. "Why are you doing this? What do you want?"

Mr. Evans face hardened to become almost expressionless. Tommy could see an odd mix of sadness mixed with an old anger. "Come into the kitchen and we will talk. I will explain some things to you about why I helped you and took you in."

Tommy followed Mr. Evans out of the bedroom and back through the house. They entered the kitchen that had the same newness as the rest of the house. Tommy noticed that the kitchen seemed odd compared to the kitchen he had seen in the orphanage. Some of the contraptions in the room seemed... advanced was the only word he could think of.

Mr. Evans took out glasses and poured himself and Tommy drinks. Tommy noticed that the drinks came from two different containers. Tommy sat down at the table as Mr. Evans set the glasses down on the table and sat down across from Tommy.

Mr. Evans sipped his drink and sat quietly for a minute. Then he sighed and said, "Tommy, I have to tell you a story. It is not very pleasant, but I think you will understand. Stop me if you want or have questions. Okay?"

Tommy solemnly nodded without saying anything. He could sense a buildup of emotions in the wizard.

Mr. Evans eyes took on a far away look and then he started, "When I was born an evil wizard was seeking power. He killed and hurt many people. My parents fought against him with a number of other people. One night he and some of his followers came to my parents' house and killed them. He was hurt while at my house and lost much of his power. He fled and was not seen again for more then ten years."

Tommy could sense that Mr. Evans was simplifying the story. "How did he get hurt?"

Mr. Evans's eyes changed with a wariness Tommy had seen in them before when looking at Tommy. Mr. Evans answered, "The answer to that is not simple, Tommy. How he got hurt is not important right now. The important thing is he did get hurt and flee."

Tommy nodded. He could see there was something that Mr. Evans did not want to reveal. It was not important right now, but Tommy felt that he needed to one day find out.

Mr. Evans continued his story. "My grandparents on both sides had already died. I only had my mother's sister. I was taken to live with her, my uncle and my cousin when I was only one."

Tommy smirked to himself. Mr. Evans thought that living with an aunt and uncle was bad? He should try living at an orphanage for a while. "At least you didn't have to live in an orphanage," Tommy muttered.

Mr. Evans gave Tommy a cold frown. "Don't be too quick to judge. My aunt and her family hated magic. They were Muggles. They called people with magic 'freaks'. When the boys beating you up called you a 'freak' it is what caused me to stop. I don't like bullies. They made me live in the cupboard under the stairs for ten years. My aunt and uncle yelled at me constantly. They never showed any affection. My cousin and his friends had a game called 'Harry Hunting'. Once they caught me, they would beat me up."

Tommy was stunned. He always thought that family loved each other. At least at the orphanage he could lose himself in the crowd of boys. He could blend in. In a quiet voice, Tommy asked, "When did they stop?"

Mr. Evans smirked and Tommy felt oddly comforted. Tommy knew that same smirk came to his own face when he got revenge on the older boys at the orphanage. Mr. Evans said, "When I was eleven, I started learning magic. I was not allowed to use it at home but I made friends who protected me until I could protect myself."

Tommy needed to know that the story was true. What Mr. Evans told him soothed the instincts that had been bothering Tommy since waking up in the hospital. Mr. Evans was not just saving Tommy, he was also trying to save himself in an odd way. Tommy looked at the wizard and asked, "Is that all true?"

Mr. Evans looked directly into Tommy's eyes and said, "Yes, Tommy. It is the truth. I simplified much but that was my life with my aunt and uncle. Do you understand now why I could understand your situation?"

Tommy nodded. Mr. Evans told him the truth. Tommy could not explain how he knew. He just knew in his soul that everything he had heard was true. Tommy felt muscles he never knew were tense relax.

Tommy realized that he and Mr. Evans were wizards, magical folk. The Muggles ruined both of their lives. Tommy could feel himself growing angry. "I don't like Muggles," Tommy said. "They treated both of us wrong because we can use magic."

Mr. Evans frowned again slightly. "People are people, Tommy. It doesn't matter if they are Muggle or magical. Remember, it was a wizard who killed my parents because they would not serve him."

Tommy felt a bit ashamed at the reminder that a wizard killed Mr. Evans' parents.

Mr. Evans sighed and said with a reluctance in his tone, "Tommy, this is true in your own situation, too."

Tommy looked up in surprise. "Did a wizard kill my parents?"

Mr. Evans shook his head. "No, Tommy. I am not sure what happened to your father, but your mother died when you were born. She was sick and gave her energy to making sure you lived."

Tommy's world rocked. His mother died to make sure he lived? Tommy always felt like his parents abandoned him. Could she really have given her life for him? "If...if she was a witch would she have lived?" Tommy asked in a small voice.

“She was a witch, Tommy. You inherited your magic from her.”

Tommy felt proud of his mother for the first time in his life. His magic came from this woman who gave herself for him. A warm sense Tommy had never felt for the thought of his mother bubbled up in Tommy's emotion. “Then what are you talking about a wizard ruining my life?”

“Tommy, there were two magical beings at the orphanage. You were one and Mr. Roughton was the other.”

Tommy's eyes started to water. Mr. Roughton was a wizard also. He was the most evil person Tommy had ever seen. Tommy needed him to be a Muggle. How could a wizard treat him so badly? “Then why would he call me freak?”

Mr. Evans reached across the table and lightly held Tommy's hand. Tommy felt a sense of reassurance flowing through his hand. Mr. Evans said in a quiet, supportive voice, “He is in jail now, Tommy. He was hiding from the Aurors, the wizard police. Maybe you reminded him of what he had lost in his darkness.” Mr. Evans paused and added, “Tommy, I have met good and bad Muggles, just like I have met good and bad wizards. It is not the power that makes one different, but what we do with it. Do you understand?”

A tear ran down Tommy's cheek. “Yes, I understand.” Mr. Evans seemed to be very wise. Tommy felt he could trust him. Mr. Evans had never lied to him, yet.

When Mr. Evans stepped around the table and wrapped his arms around Tommy, he felt his emotions break free. His tears started flowing as he sobbed on the wizard's shoulder.

Getting control of himself, Tommy leaned back and wiped away his tears. Tommy asked, “What should I call you?”

Mr. Evans smiled. “Well, Mr. Evans is too formal. How about Uncle James?”

Tommy smiled, he liked the idea of calling this wizard Uncle. For the first time in his life, Tommy began to feel safe. Tommy felt a tug of

mischievousness in his happiness. He put his arms around his new uncle in a hug and said, "Thanks, Uncle Jimmy!"

Uncle James scowled at Tommy at the new name. Tommy would have felt concern but he could see the laughter in Uncle James's eyes. Tommy laughed in his relief.

"Can we go out and try out my broom?" Tommy asked.

Uncle James smiled, an excitement built in his eyes at the mention of flying on the broom. "Sure we can Tommy. Go get your broom. Afterwards we can walk around Hogsmeade and you can see the town."

Tommy ran out of the kitchen to get his broom. Today was turning out to be a good day.

A/N: Please don't email me about the Harry-hunting comment James made to Tommy. I am aware it was a slip on James's part. It was not a slip on mine. I wanted to give Tommy a small clue that there were other things happening. Also, it felt natural for James to slip there and call it Harry-hunting.

Chapter 4 – A New Life

July 14, 1935

“Uncle Jimmy, look at me!”

James Evans watched the screaming eight year-old fly by on his broomstick thirty feet off the ground. The young man known as Harry Potter in another time smiled at the young aerial demon passing by overhead.

“You are doing great, Tommy! Don’t loose your focus!”

Today marked a special anniversary for Tommy. It was one year ago that Tommy arrived in Hogsmeade to start his new life. It had been a year of change and discovery for the orphaned Riddle. Learning about magic and the magical life absorbed the boy’s fascination. Tommy enjoyed seeing things done with magic and was constantly asking questions about how the magic worked.

James felt the growth in Tommy over the last year. The first six months had been rough overcoming the accumulated mistrust of seven years in the orphanage. Tommy had developed a thick shield to cover his emotional damage from his previous environment. James worked for weeks to develop a solid level of trust with the boy.

James started teaching him to read and basic math. James also added magic and scientific theory. Tommy accepted the first two subjects, embraced the third, and resisted the fourth. James smirked at the memory of their arguments on the subject.

“Why do I have to learn science? That is for Muggles!” Tommy stated.

“Because Muggles can sometimes do things wizards cannot.” James replied in a calm voice.

The boy scowled at his “uncle”. “Magic is better!”

James shook his head. “No, just different.” Before the boy could interrupt, James raised his hand and continued. “Muggle science has

been improving rapidly over the last hundred or so years. I think it will continue.

Look at their airplanes. Twenty-five years ago, they could fly very short distances. Then eight years ago an American flew solo from New York to Paris non-stop. Today you can travel by air back and forth. The average wizard can Apparate around Britain almost instantly. But traveling that way to America would not be possible. Airplanes, telephones, wireless; they are all inventions to let Muggles do what wizards can."

Tommy took on a rebellious expression. James understood that the last thing Tommy wanted to hear was positive things about Muggles, but it was necessary. It was also true.

"Tommy, look at it this way. Muggles can't do magic. Do you agree that the average Muggle would want to do magic?"

Tommy grudgingly nodded.

"Isn't a telephone simply an attempt to make a Floo call? Or airplanes their version of a broom?" James could see the boy resisting the idea.

"Tommy, can I share with you an observation I have made about magical folk? The magical community is happy to use the same spells and other magic that their grandfathers did. The reason the Hogwarts Founders are so idolized is they led the last great surge of magical discoveries. Most of the new magic discoveries today is from Muggle-born or raised wizards that still have a Muggle's curiosity to them.

Tommy, you still have that curiosity. That is why you ask me so many questions. As a Muggle-raised wizard myself, I am in the same category."

The argument carried on for sometime and repeated at various times. It was not until James introduced some basic electrical theory that Tommy started to show a real interest in the sciences.

Arguments over study subjects were not the only rough spots in their first year. Tommy developed a major resistance to authority figures in

the orphanage. Once the newness of living with James had worn off, Tommy started resisting James's authority. Simple assigned chores became a daily battleground. James had to constantly keep himself calm and remember his life with the Dursleys.

In time, James's patience won out over Tommy's resistance. Tommy grew to accept James as an authority figure who would not abuse him.

James focused his time on Tommy. Tommy was the number one priority in James's life. He really was the ONLY reason James / Harry was here. When Tommy was doing schoolwork or playing with other children from the village, James worked on his own studies and his Phoenix Foundation. James hired a Muggle-born witch named Mary Catchbottom to run the orphanage on his behalf.

Madam Catchbottom was a trained, experienced teacher and a gifted administrator. She had gathered a staff through her large network of colleagues, both magical and Muggle. A sweep of Muggle orphanages throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland was performed to locate any magical children. Not many had stories similar to Tommy's abuse, but all of them were very excited to learn they could be witches and wizards.

The Ministry of Magic had a mixed response at first. The idea that the population included squibs and some purely Muggle children bothered them greatly at first. Their pressure mounted until James arranged for the Prophet to run a major article speaking about the positive efforts of the Phoenix Foundation. The Ministry received a great deal of credit for "initiating the effort to look after the magical children with no one to look after them." James didn't care who got the credit as long as it worked. Ironically, the orphanage's school had received inquiries about providing day schooling for other magical children in the London area.

"Come on down, Tommy!" James called. "We are going to the Three Broomsticks for lunch!"

Tommy landed neatly in the yard and dismounted from his broom. "I love flying Uncle James, but the broom really gets uncomfortable after a while."

“I can agree with you there, Tommy. Hopefully someone will develop a better Cushioning charm for brooms. Go get cleaned up for lunch.” James had to agree with Tommy. He was amazed at the difference in comfort, speed and control between the current brooms and his Firebolt. James longed to bring out his “old” broom and fly around the garden.

Ten minutes later, Tommy had reappeared and the young uncle and his ward were happily walking down the streets of Hogsmeade.

After a wonderful lunch at the Three Broomsticks, James was watching Tommy demolish a most chocolate cake James had ever seen. The cake was so sweet it curled James’s teeth simply looking at it.

Tommy smiled up at his uncle revealing chocolate cake all through his teeth. James laughed at the chocolate grin. The Harry that traveled back through time would have never expected to see James sitting happily with the boy who would have been known as Lord Voldemort in another time.

James was so concentrated on watching Tommy consume the cake before him that he missed the arrival of two men onto the pub. The men simply walked over to the bar and quietly ordered drinks.

James felt an odd presence in the room and glanced around the room. He quickly spotted the men at the bar. The first wizard wore fairly standard black robes but made of the finest material. He had thick black hair that seemed mussed. James could not make out his features as his back was to James. The second wizard caused all kinds of emotions to roll through James. The auburn-haired wizard wore a pale blue robe and a pointed hat. James recognized him immediately.

It was Dumbledore!

The last time James had seen the wizard with auburn hair had been while watching in the wizard’s own Pensieve while the wizard talked to a slightly older version of the boy sitting across from James right now. A skewed sense of déjà vu caused James to shiver slightly.

Dumbledore's death left Harry with a number of open issues. Returning to Hogwarts for his Sixth year, Harry left many of his issues slide. Why was he left with the Dursleys? Why didn't he receive special training to fight Voldemort before Dumbledore's death? Why would no one tell him the detail of his parents' lives? All of these things needed to be answered. But right now, none of it mattered. Harry was just happy to see Dumbledore alive.

James knew that Professor Dumbledore was the well-respected teacher of Transfiguration at Hogwarts. Living at the base of the hill Hogwarts sat atop made it impossible to not know. (James was actually amused how quickly the stories of the misadventures of the students reached the citizens of Hogsmeade.) Dumbledore was ten years away from his confrontation with Grindelwald. Combined with the honors he received after his victory, Dumbledore was not yet the legendary figure he became by the time Harry attended Hogwarts.

James found sitting in the Three Broomsticks with the much-younger Dumbledore twenty feet away that those issues no longer really concerned him. He had survived his hurdles. It was simply a happy moment to see the old wizard alive again.

James study of the young Professor Dumbledore had not gone unnoticed. His companion quietly commented to the Transfiguration professor. James came out of his reflections to be confronted by a familiar gaze. James quickly turned back to his table and looked down.

"May I help you, young sir?"

Tommy stopped eating his cake and looked up with a full mouth and a question on his face. James turned and found Dumbledore standing next to his table. James realized he had to play this cool.

James stood and said, "I apologize sir. Your appearance reminded me of an old teacher of mine." James smiled slightly, "He was quite a bit older then you, but a very similar appearance. I am afraid I became lost in thought."

Dumbledore's familiar slight smile appeared, "I often find myself lost in my thoughts. I find it quite enjoyable."

James laughed and extended his hand, "My name is James Evans. This is my ward, Tommy Riddle."

The professor took James hand and said, "Albus Dumbledore. It is very nice to meet you both."

"Evans?" a no-nonsense voice asked.

Harry glanced at the other wizard who came in with Dumbledore. He stood a step behind the professor and had been listening to the introductions.

James did not recognize the other wizard. He seemed to be only slightly younger than Dumbledore. James could not place him as either an Order member or any other friend of Dumbledore's he had met.

"Yes, James Evans. I live here in Hogsmeade."

"The same James Evans who runs the Phoenix Foundation in London?"

James noticed an increased level of interest from Dumbledore at this question. "Yes, I founded the Foundation. I really think Madam Catchbottom runs it. She tells everyone what to do, even me." James grinned during the last part.

The no-nonsense wizard let out a short harsh laugh. "I can believe that. I went to school with that witch. I was a Prefect when she was a Firstie. She kept me in line!"

The wizard extended his hand to James, "I am Thomas Potter. I like what you are doing there."

'Wow,' thought James, "you really can feel your heart stop.' James recognized the same unruly hair James himself had, although Thomas Potter's was not quite as dark and now mixed with grey.

James grasped the other wizard's hand firmly and said, "It is very nice to meet you, Mr. Potter."

Professor Dumbledore said, "You started the new orphanage? I think that was a very good thing. Several of my students were looking forward to spending their first summer at your new establishment."

James laughed. "Well they will enjoy living there." James's grin returned, "Although unless they are all Ravenclaw's they may not like some of the living requirements."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow in a curious expression.

"We have the school for the younger students running year round. Students arriving from magical school are enrolled in summer enrichment classes. This means they are allowed to use magic on their summer break. We also review their assigned school homework."

Professor Dumbledore chuckled at the dry humor in James's tone. "Some of our student's may be dismayed at the additional work, but I think most will find the use of magic to offset that disappointment."

Mr. Potter asked, "Why did you continue the school year round?"

James shrugged, "Our students don't have a home to go to. Why lose the time? It makes the schedule lighter the rest of the year. It also gets us around the Ministry's prohibition on underage use of magic." James then added, "I find the application of that law to be most unfair."

Mr. Potter (James was trying REALLY hard not to think of the man as his own grandfather.) asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"Hmm," Harry considered, "that may take a bit to answer. Would you gentlemen care to join us?"

The two wizard's shared a quick glance. Dumbledore said, "Yes, I think I would like to know you as we will be sharing the responsibility for several students."

James noticed Tommy's eyes had gotten a little big at the sight of the two strange wizards joining them. James gave him a small hand signal to indicate to the boy that everything was okay. James felt

himself warmed when Tommy immediately relaxed a bit. 'Tommy really is coming to trust me.'

Once the wizards were seated James turned to his grandfather and said, "Mr. Potter, before I answer your question, let me ask, are you a pureblood?"

A slightly cold look came to Thomas Potter's eye. "Yes, I am. Why?"

"You were able to do magic during your summers, yes?"

"Only with my parents or tutors."

James nodded, "The law allows those loopholes. For a pureblood it makes studying over the summer much easier. The continued use of magic helps build up the student's magical endurance. The non-pureblood student loses that opportunity and may actually lose some of the endurance they built up over the school year."

"Rubbish!" Potter scoffed. "The reason purebloods are stronger is the lack of Muggle blood in their veins."

It saddened James to hear this out of his grandfather. In a calm voice, James said, "I became an orphan because a dark wizard believed in blood purity. My father was pure but my mother was a Muggle-born witch. This makes me a half-blood by magical society's reckoning. I fought many pureblood wizards after that in battle. I live. They do not."

The two wizards looked at James with shock on their face.

James indicated Tommy. "Tommy is a half-blood also. His mother was a witch who died in childbirth. Yet, his family on his mother's side had been pureblood back past the time of the Hogwart's Founders. Yet by modern society's standards he is immediately a second class citizen because his father was a Muggle."

Tommy's eyes grew large at his Uncle James's comment. James noticed and added, "I however, think Tommy is going to be a most excellent wizard."

Tommy grinned back at his guardian.

Professor Dumbledore smiled, "I agree with you, Mr. Evans. Some of my best students have come from Muggle backgrounds."

"I will agree you make a good argument," Thomas Potter added. "I am not sure I agree with you, but I am also not a blood reactionary like some others I know."

"The world is getting smaller, gentlemen. The Muggles base purity on where one's ancestors were born. This madman who has taken control in Germany will soon demonstrate the errors of determining one group is better solely on their ancestry," James added.

Again, Dumbledore and Potter exchanged quiet glances.

James noticed and said, "I apologize if I have given you offense. I am afraid that particular topic gets me up on my soap box." When both wizards looked confused by this, James added, "It is a Muggle expression."

"We understand Mr. Evans. We are not offended. We have had similar discussions ourselves many times in the past," Professor Dumbledore assured him.

"I am curious," Mr. Potter stated. "You talked about fighting Dark Wizards. How could you have done this at your age?"

The last year with Tommy had done as much to heal James as it had done to heal Tommy. Harry, The-Boy-Who-Lived, now truly saw himself as James, The-Man-With-A-Life. For a second Harry peaked out of James's eyes. Looking at Mr. Potter, Harry answered, "I have lived in Hogsmeade for the past twelve months. With the exception of the time of from my birth to 15 months of age, that is the longest time of peace in my life."

Harry stepped back and allowed James to step back into place. "Pardon me gentlemen, I came to this time and place to recover and forget my battles. Apparently they are not as buried as I would like."

Mr. Potter shook his head, "Nonsense, I asked a question. I should have kept my curiosity in check."

"Indeed Thomas," Dumbledore smiled slightly, "that curiosity is the same one that caused us to keep getting detentions for sneaking into the Forbidden Forest."

James decided that at that instant he would have loved to hear those stories. James wished that Harry knew them when he started Hogwarts. Think of all the trouble he could have gotten out of in exchange for his silence!

"Thank you," James said. James looked at Tommy's plate and said, "I have promised this young man a trip to Diagon Alley this afternoon. If you would excuse us, I believe he is ready now."

Taking their leave of the two wizards, Dumbledore informed James that the people of Hogsmeade were invited to visit the school to watch the House Quidditch matches. Tommy squeaked with excitement about seeing a real Quidditch match.

James smiled down at Tommy and said, "I don't think I need to ask this one about taking you up on your invitation."

Tommy bounced on his toes, "Uncle James was a Seeker! He is a great flyer!"

"Well, then we will see you in the fall for our opening match. I believe it will be Gryffindor and Slytherin Houses."

"Thank you, professor. It was nice meeting you both."

James and Tommy walked out of the Three Broomsticks leaving the money for their meal on the table. The two wizards watched as James placed his arm around Tommy and Apparated in mid-step with an almost silent pop.

If James had been able to look back, he would have seen two wizards with looks of amazement on their faces.

James and Tommy arrived in Diagon Alley in mid-stride. They kept walking like they had just stepped through a door.

Tommy's eyes grew large looking around the Alley. James had been shocked the first time he came here also. Both times actually he thought with a smirk. The first time with Hagrid at eleven. Then again when he arrived in 1934.

No Dark Lord had stood in the British Isles for over 100 years. Lord Caligo attempted to seize power in the early 1800's. Since then, the magical communities of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland had lived in peace and prosperity. The Alley showed the results of that time. The shops bloomed with all kinds of goods from throughout the British Empire. People walked the Alley with no concerns of attack. They had an open friendliness Harry Potter had never seen, even at eleven. It was a friendliness that James Evans was just starting to accept.

Tommy walked excitedly down the Alley trying to look at everything at once. The Quality Quidditch Supply store still stood in the same place. Tommy pointed excitedly at the Tinderblast broom in the window. He started reciting all of the facts to James about its performance.

James laughed and said, "I think I have corrupted you into a Quidditch fanatic." Tommy simply grinned and nodded.

After James pulled Tommy away from the window, they started walking down the Alley. Tommy kept casting longing glances back towards the Quidditch shop. Then Tommy saw it, The British Wizards Magical Toy Company. It was filled with dozens of children searching for that perfect toy to pester...er, ask their parents for.

Tommy dropped James's hand and joined in the free-for-all in the shop. James just shook his head and followed at a more sedate pace. James stopped outside the shop to enjoy watching Tommy at play.

Tommy had not been around many other children his own age for the last year. After his experiences in the orphanage, it was not something the boy missed. James had been concerned that being around kids his own age would cause him to slip into his old ways. However, because of either the passage of time or the existence of

so many great toys, Tommy was showing no signs of any stress from being around other kids.

James leaned against the wall and watched Tommy through the shop window. 'Right now, Tommy could not look anything further from Voldemort,' he thought.

"Mr. Evans?" a quiet woman's voice asked him from behind.

James turned away from the shop and faced the woman who had addressed him. James found himself facing a young blond woman with slightly shorter than James with long hair hanging over one of her shoulders. She had brilliant blue eyes and hints of dimples in her cheeks. With the humor in her eyes, James immediately thought of a Veela mixed with an imp.

"Yes, I am James Evans. May I help you?"

"I am crushed," the young woman said. "You don't remember me." The dimples came out to play as she smiled at James discomfort.

Then it hit him, Tommy's medi-witch from St. Mungos, Sarah Underhill.

"Ms. Underhill! It is very nice to see you again," James said.

"It is nice to see you too, Mr. Evans. How is Tommy doing?" the young woman asked.

"He is doing very well. It has been a good year for him. He is in the store right now looking for a new toy. We looked for you at the hospital one day but they said you had left."

A slight pink came to Ms. Underhill's cheeks. "You stopped to see me? That is so sweet of you! I started training to become a full Healer last autumn."

James smiled, "That is great! I already know that you have an excellent bedside manner from your time with Tommy. I know that we both appreciated your help last spring."

“Well, he was a very good patient. Such a cute little boy. Are you still living in Hogsmeade, Mr. Evans?”

“Please, call me James. Yes, we do live there still. In fact today is the one year anniversary of Tommy’s arrival at his new home.”

“Really? It doesn’t seem to have been that long!” Ms. Underhill gave James a shy smile. “I am not sure I should call you James. I barely know you, Mr. Evans.”

“I am sorry. I was not raised here. Having a beautiful woman my own age call me Mister seems wrong.”

As the words left his mouth, James could feel a blush growing on his face. Great, James thought. I run into the only woman since Ginny that I feel any attraction to and I come like Malfoy trying to chat her up! I probably look like a Weasley to boot!

In his embarrassment, James failed to notice her blush mixed with a very pleased smile.

Before either of the blushing adults could recover, Tommy suddenly appeared next to James like he Apparated. “Uncle James, can I get a ... Um, Uncle James, why are you turning colors like that?” Tommy started to giggle, “You look like a tomato!”

To James, Ms. Underhill said, “Then, please call me Sarah.”

That was the final straw. Ms. Underhill started to giggle. James quickly joined her. Soon both adults were laughing quite hard.

Tommy watched them with an expression every kid in the world knows. “Adults are weird.”

Tommy, James and Sarah spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying Diagon Alley. Sarah acted as tour guide. She knew all kinds of little details even James never knew. James figured it was simply an example of the difference between growing up in the magical world and growing up in the Muggle world.

James led the others to the Magical Menagerie to purchase a new owl. James could not bring himself before now to purchase a new owl. Hedwig's death at the hands of Crabbe and Goyle just before the Final Battle hurt as much as Ginny's death in some ways. Hedwig was a close friend who had been with Harry for every summer at the Dursleys. Harry often talked to her for hours about his feelings and fears, particularly after Fifth year and Sirius's death.

James purchased a small barn owl with white ears and chest but was otherwise all brown. Tommy promptly named him Tufts. James was a little nervous because the little owl seemed to have Pig's energy level. He did seem to be a bit more intelligent than Pig. At least he listened to orders.

Tommy received a special gift from James, a small black puppy. James could not tell who was more excited, the boy or the puppy. The puppy was only a couple of weeks old, just barely old enough to leave his mother. According to the shop worker, the puppy was descended from a breed of Oriental dogs known as Spirit Guardians. Looking at the paws, James figured there was a good chance that the puppy would grow to a significant size.

"Now remember, he will be your responsibility. You will have to feed him and care for him." James told Tommy.

"I will, Uncle Jimmy! What should I name him? Did you have a dog when you were my age?"

"No, Tommy. I didn't..." James started to tell Tommy he did not have a dog as a boy, but instead he said, "I didn't have a dog, but my godfather did. I called him Snuffles. His real name was Padfoot."

Tommy giggled, "Snuffles! I like that name. Can I name my puppy Snuffles too?"

The image of Sirius's face upon meeting a puppy named Snuffles flashed through James's mind. James started laughing deep belly laughs. Tommy and Sarah looked at James trying to figure out what the joke was.

When he finally got control back, he gasped out, "Sure Tommy. I think ol' Snuffles would have really liked that."

The afternoon was drawing to a close and Tommy was showing signs of exhaustion. Without talking about it, the adults started to make their way towards one of the Apparation points. James carried a number of bags from their expedition to Diagon Alley. Tommy carried his puppy with a happy but worn out grin.

Reaching the Apparition point, James turned to Sarah and asked if she would like to join the two for dinner.

Sarah smiled, but begged off. "I would love to, but I have class tomorrow. I need to revise my notes. Between work and school, I have been rather busy. It was a miracle you ran into me today. Mondays afternoons and Saturdays are my only time not set aside for school, work or studying."

James smiled, but internally he was thinking, 'I am horrible dealing with women! I was more comfortable walking into my final battle with Voldemort! Maybe she was just being nice because of Tommy and I misread her.'

James realized he had to give her a graceful way of leaving. "I completely understand. Maybe some other time then?"

Sarah smiled, "How about Friday night? I get done work at 6. We could meet for dinner?"

James was shocked she had actually set up an alternative date. He expected her to simply give a vague promise. Maybe she was interested. James hoped so. This afternoon was the first time he felt... normal in a long time.

"That would be very nice. I would like to make you dinner at our house. I will plan on having the dinner ready at 7."

Sarah gave James a sly smile with full dimple power. "A man who cooks? How can I resist? I would love to join you. At least, if Tommy thinks it is okay." Sarah and James looked down at Tommy who seemed more interested in his puppy.

“Tommy, would you like for Ms. Underhill to join us for dinner on Friday?” James asked.

Tommy gave them both a sleepy smile. “Sure, Uncle James. That would be okay.”

James and Sarah exchanged smiles. Sarah said, “Then I will see you Friday. You better get this young man home know. He seems a bit tired.”

After they said their good byes, James guided Tommy into the Apparation point. Before James could Apparate, Tommy looked up with no sign of fatigue in his eyes and a cheeky grin on his face.

“So Uncle Jimmy, do you have a girlfriend know?”

As James Apparated away, he prayed that Sarah had not heard Tommy’s question. It was not a pray he had much faith in from the last second glance he had of her face.

July 18, 1935

An eight-year-old boy, a 3-month-old puppy and an owl contributed to make this a very long week for James. Of the three of them, only Tommy really meant to make the week longer. Tommy kept asking at odd intervals how much longer before Ms. Underhill came to visit. Snuffles was simply a new puppy. With puppy enthusiasm, he ran through the house exploring everything. It did not help that Snuffles seemed to understand the need to keep James happy. This was usually by making sad puppy eyes at James whenever he got into something he should not have. Tufts enjoyed flying through the house and circling over wherever Snuffles was currently getting in trouble.

James’s answer to the situation was to send all three out of the house. Tommy took to running through the village with puppy in tow and owl overhead. James figured that the more energy they spent outside, the less energy they would have inside. It worked... kind of.

Friday finally arrived.

James and Tommy worked on various school assignments in the morning. Today they worked on electricity. Tommy was impressed when he found out that Benjamin Franklin, an American credited with many early discoveries about electricity, was also a wizard. James had never learned that in History of Magic either. (Maybe Binns covered it while Harry was sleeping.) In the magical world, Franklin was credited with creating the field of Technomancy, the combination of magic and Muggle science. Franklin discovered electricity with a famous kite flying experiment. Fortunately being a wizard, he survived the jolt that knocked him on his arse.

Tommy seemed taken by the idea Franklin was a wizard. Franklin ended his public Muggle life in 1790 by “dying” at the age of 84. He really became the Headmaster of the Philadelphia Academy of Magic, a school he founded. This school was hidden next to another school he founded, the Academy of Philadelphia, a Muggle university later known as the University of Pennsylvania.

James was very glad to have found this information. It made Tommy a bit more accepting of Muggles. Franklin seemed to be a very good role model for focusing Tommy. Anything that decreased the possible rise of Voldemort was something to use.

In the afternoon, Tommy, Snuffles and Tufts were sent out of the house while James worked on plans for the Phoenix Foundation. Something Professor Dumbledore mentioned struck a cord with James. Since several Hogwarts students would be spending their holidays at the Phoenix orphanage, James really should meet with the current Headmaster and establish a relationship with him. Hopefully James could establish a positive relationship that would allow them to smooth over any issues that could arise.

Sarah arrived promptly at 6:30 in very nice set of witch's robes that gave subtle hints at the body underneath. James found himself wishing for the Muggle fashions he had seen when he was in school. The thought of Sarah in a mini-skirt caused James's heart to beat a bit faster.

Sarah arrived via the Floo in the sitting room. James greeted her with a huge smile.

“Hello James. I love your house. It seems so perfect for you,” she said with a smile.

“Thank you. I had a lot of fun getting moved in. My agent helped me picking colors and furniture.”

Sarah’s dimples made an appearance. “Yes, I know. Anne Prewett. She was a year ahead of me at in my House at Hogwarts.”

That made James nervous. Women talking about him was never a good sign in his experience. “Really. It is a small wold.”

“Relax,” Sarah said, “I ran into her at the hospital. She is pregnant and I am doing a rotation through the maternity ward. She wanted to tell me about this cute guy who she sold a house to in Hogsmeade.”

James thanked his Occulamacy as he kept a straight face and said, “I am glad to hear she sold another house.”

Sarah turned her full smile and dimples on James. “Oh, I think someone is trying to be modest.”

James decided, as the son, godson and “nephew” of Marauders, that comment need a return shot. “Not humble. You merely put us poor mortals to shame.”

Sarah rewarded this comment with laughter. James really liked her laugh. He decided he could listen to her for hours just laugh.

That thought made James stop for a second.

Was he falling in love with Sarah?

Um, yep?

Wow, this made things more complicated. He was going to need to think about this later.

Tommy came into the room tailed by his furry and feathered companions. “Hi Ms. Underhill. Can we eat now, Uncle James? We are hungry.”

James looked at Sarah. Are you ready to eat now. The Horrible Trio sounds like they are ready.”

Sarah agreed and they made their way into the Dining Room. James had a good English dinner prepared. He was glad now that he had done all of the cooking at the Dursleys.

James asked her about her time at Hogwarts during dinner.

“I was a ‘Puff. I loved it there. I spent time in the Hospital Ward as Madam O’Niel’s assistant in my Sixth and Seventh years. I made a lot of good friends there. Potions with Professor Matthews was my favorite then Transfiguration with Professor Dumbledore.”

“Did you know there are 393 ceiling tiles in the Hospital Wing?” James asked.

“Really? I never counted. How did you know that?”

“I must have read it somewhere,” James answered with a cheeky grin. Actually, it was waking up there so many times it had become a project to keep himself occupied. After he told Madam Pomfrey how many tiles there were she dedicated a bed just for his use.

“Did you play Quidditch?” Tommy asked.

“No,” answered Sarah, “but I did enjoy cheering my House on. We never won the Cup but we always had good fun doing it!”

“Isn’t it more fun to win?” Tommy asked in an innocent voice.

“I suppose, Tommy. But if you win without having fun and enjoying your friends at the same time what is the point?” Sarah asked.

Tommy merely nodded and did not answer.

Sarah turned back to James. “So, tell me about where you grew up?”

James went a bit pale. “Er, I don’t really like to talk about it much. My parents were killed when I was a baby. There was a Dark Lord, so I

grew up in a war zone. I came here after the war to try to live in peace and put my life back together.”

Sarah reached over to take James’s hand. “I am so sorry. I did not mean to bring up any painful memories.”

“Uncle Jimmy has nightmare, like me, sometimes,” Tommy said in a quiet voice. “They scare me.”

James immediately looked at Tommy. In a gentle voice he said, “I am sorry, Tommy, if my dreams scared you. I will start using a Silencing Charm at night so I don’t wake you up. Okay?”

“Okay, Uncle Jimmy. But I would rather you not have nightmares like those. They sound really bad.”

“Thank you, Tommy. I wish you did not have your nightmares either. We have both seen too much.”

James noticed that Sarah was watching this with unshed tears in her eyes. James said, “I am sorry. This conversation really took a wrong turn. Lets talk about something more pleasant. How is your Healer program progressing?”

Sarah smiled a thank you for the subject change. With a visible effort, she pulled back on her emotions.

“It is going brilliantly! My professors are excellent and I am learning so much! The year at St. Mungos as a medi-witch paid off. I understand better then my fellows how a hospital works, not just what the books say.”

“Is that what you planned when you took that position?” James asked.

“No, I thought I wanted to go back to Hogwarts and take Madam O’Niel’s position when she retires in a couple of years.”

James grinned, “If I knew you were going to be in the hospital wing, I would find a reason to go!”

Sarah giggled. "You are naughty James! You shouldn't say things like that!"

"Sorry," James said. "I am still not used to the rules here. Forgive me."

Sarah waved this away. "No, it is fine. I believe you are just saying the same things we are all thinking anyway!"

James decided to try to turn back to a safer topic. "So what made you change your mind about becoming a full Healer?"

"Pure luck actually," was the candid answer. "A new charity was looking for someone to work for them for three years after graduating in return for paying a large part of the tuition. One of the Healers mentioned it to me one night. I figured I couldn't pass it up. So I applied."

"Very good! What charity was it?" James asked.

"It is very new. It is called the Phoenix Foundation."

James paused, his face blank for a moment. Could she know he was the finance behind the Phoenix Foundation? He had kept his name out of the press as much as possible. Mrs. Catchbottom was the face of the Phoenix Foundation.

"What do you think of their work?" James asked in a casual voice.

"Well, I would not have taken the position if I did not approve. The money didn't matter that much. Those kids deserve a good place to stay without hiding who they are," came the immediate answer. "Don't you agree?"

James started to agree but was interrupted by a happy eight-year-old voice.

"Mrs. Catchbottom is really nice! She runs the orphanage a lot better than Mr. Roughton did!"

Sarah looked stunned. "Was that the place you were in before Tommy? It was horrible before! No wonder..." Sarah bit off the rest of what she was going to say. James could almost complete the sentence for her through.

Sarah looked at James. "Is that how Mrs. Catchbottom learned about that place? Did you tell her?"

"In a manner of speaking," James said.

"Can I be excused, please?" Tommy asked. "Snuffles and Tufts want to play some more." Tommy used the cute little boy voice coupled with big, innocent brown eyes.

James snorted, "Take off you three. Be home before the sun goes down. There is a full moon out tonight."

"Yes, Uncle Jimmy!" Tommy yelled back as he bolted out of the room.

Sarah said quietly, "You have really made a difference with him. He does not seem like the same boy."

Almost to himself, James said, "Merlin, I hope not."

"How does Tommy know Mrs. Catchbottom. She did not start Phoenix until months after you brought Tommy in."

James shrugged. "I guess you could say I am her silent partner."

Sarah's eyes grew big. "You are her anonymous donor? Everyone in London is curious about who is funding Phoenix. Why don't you tell people?"

James sighed. "I don't like people pointing at me. I just want to be normal. Helping those kids was just the right thing to do. Just like with Tommy."

Sarah looked touched by James quiet comment. For a moment James was tempted to use Leglimancy to find out what she was thinking. He pushed the temptation away.

They moved to the Sitting Room and talked quietly for a couple more hours. James enjoyed this time immensely. Not since his Sixth year in the Gryffindor common rooms had James had the opportunity to simply sit and talk with a peer just for the pleasure of it.

The longer the conversation lasted, the more James wanted to tell her everything. The need to talk about all of the things he had endured for the last several years astonished the young wizard.

Finally, Sarah stood and prepared to leave. "Thank you for a wonderful time. I really enjoyed myself."

James stood with her and said, "I enjoyed it more then you can know. May I call you up again?"

Sarah's smiled with hints of her dimples and a sparkle in her eye. "Yes, Mr. Evans. Most definitely yes."

Then she took a pinch of Floo power and tossed it into the fire. As the fire flared green, she turned and quickly gave James a light kiss on the lips. It felt like his lips had been brushed with a feather. The she stepped into the fire and was gone.

James stood with a happy grin. For the first time he truly felt happy. Then he heard a sly voice say innocently.

"See Snuffles, I was right. Uncle Jimmy does have a girlfriend!"

A/N: Next chapter: Hogwarts, Quidditch, and a Dueling Club!

Chapter 5 – Quidditch and Happiness

Happiness, in Harry Potter's experience, never last more than a brief time. This time was usually measured in hours. Growing up with the Dursleys did not lend itself to happiness, or even the expectation that happiness was possible. Arriving at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry did bring Harry happiness, but the pointing, the starring, and Malfoy kept it from lasting long. The efforts of Voldemort, Death Eaters and various Professors to kill, maim or Oblivate him contributed also.

Harry Potter never knew what it was to be "normal". Normality and happiness seemed to be forever out of his reach. It was something other people had, never him. Many times in the Great Hall he would see students enjoying a normal life. No one wanted to kill them. Sure, the Death Eaters may attack, but did not target them personally. Sometimes Harry turned his head from seeing their happiness when he felt a blackness rise up within him.

Few of Harry's classmates saw Harry and not Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived. Ron (usually), Hermione, Ginny, Luna, Neville, and the Weasley twins made up the whole list. They did know good times. Being in love with Ginny provided Harry a joy he had never known before. Happiness was a fleeting thing grabbed between struggles. It would not last. Why should it? It never had before.

James Evans was happy. A beautiful autumn day dawned on the first day of the Hogwarts Quidditch season of 1935-36. James walked towards the school with his arm around a beautiful blond witch. Running in front of him, a young eight-year-old boy and an eight-month-old puppy played an elaborate game of chase. James glanced at Sarah and shared a smile with her at their antics.

Tommy and Snuffles quickly became inseparable. Awake or asleep, the pair were never more than ten feet apart. The tiny puppy had grown at an almost visible rate. In six months, he grew from a five-pound ball of fur to a thirty-pound imp. Snuffles thought everything in his reach was free game to sniff, chew, or play. When caught, Snuffles displayed a master's ability to look cute and innocent.

Tommy came out of his shell with Snuffles. The small boy smiled constantly while running through Hogsmeade with his canine companion. Tommy still avoided contact with the other children in the village. Instead, the small boy and the gangly puppy spent all of their free time in games only they could understand.

To James's knowledge, none of other children in the village were within two years of Tommy's age. It seemed all of the other children fell into two clumps. One large contingent were ages 4-6. Tommy avoided them as being too little. (James was concerned by the sneers Tommy directed at these younger children.) The other group consisted of 10-11 year olds preparing to start at Hogwarts in the next year or two. Tommy avoided this group. James assumed Tommy's experience with being picked on by the older boys at the orphanage would take time to heal and fade.

For James the last six months equaled all of the happiness he had ever known in his life. When James arrived in this time, he was mentally and emotionally shattered from the outcome of the war. Winning did not compensate for seeing his friends die. The Pyrrhic victory left a very damaged young man. James's year with Tommy went a long way towards healing those wounds. James Evans lived his life and shelved Harry Potter's pain.

Sarah's presence in James's life completed that transformation. They started slowly with dinners at the Three Broomsticks. Sarah never lived with the threat of a Dark Lord. She maintained a child-like innocence and acceptance of the world around her. As a medi-witch, Sarah saw some of the evil people, magical or Muggle, could do to each other, but not as a sustained, organized effort. James enjoyed her open outlook and love of life.

James realized he had received his second greatest wish. He was completely normal. His scare never hurt. (Tommy was happy.) No one knew him as The-Boy-Who-Lived. James could walk down any street as just another wizard. No prophecy, no Chosen One, just life on his own terms. The Phoenix Foundation ran without his day-to-day guidance. As the silent backer, only some in the Ministry and the Foundation itself knew his name. Although the orphanage and its

school significantly influenced the lives of some children, the general wizarding world did not notice its existence.

James, Sarah, and Tommy arrived with their canine escort at the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch. The stands were slightly larger than James remembered them from Harry's time. The colorful banners hung from the stands. There was a purely festive feeling to the air.

Sitting on the bench in the visitor's section of the stands, James was impressed with the number of student in the stands. James estimated the current student body of Hogwarts was 20-30 larger than when he attended. Had the wars with the Dark Lords done that much damage to the Wizarding population?

James's attention was drawn to the center stand where the announcer was located.

"Good morning Hogwarts staff, students and visitors! My name is Albert Scundermier and I will be your announcer for today. We have a great match for you today. The traditional start to our season, Gryffindor vs. Slytherin!"

The crowds went crazy yelling their excitement for the start of the match.

"First our illustrious Headmaster would like to have a few words! Professor Dippet"

James's watched as the Headmaster, Armando Dippet stepped to the announcer's position. James recognized the old wizard from the memories that Tom Riddle showed him in the diary.

"Good morning everyone! It is so grand to see our turnout today! It warms my heart to see everyone here in the spirit of friendly competition!"

The headmaster paused to allow the crowd to finish cheering his words.

"After today's match, the Dueling Club will be hosting and performing an exhibition of dueling skills. Some of our older students will be

permitted to challenge staff members and some visiting Aurors to friendly duels. Everyone is invited to attend this event! Now, let the games begin!”

The announcer, Albert Scundermier, returned to his position.

“For Gryffindor, we have Greene, Halibutte, McMillian, Smithe-Brown, Longbottom, Weaver and O’Neill!”

The Gryffindor team flew out of their locker rooms to zoom around the pitch in formation. James thought it was a nice effect to see the team fly as a unit. The sound from the stands grew to a roar when the team came out.

“Now the Slytherin team! We have Bulstrode, Malfoy, Wellington, Black, Flint, Fulstone, and Gobbson!”

The Slytherin team flew out of their locker room in formation like the Gryffindor team. Their formation was different but the intent was the same.

James was impressed with the response both teams received. The Ravensclaws and Hufflepuffs cheered almost as loudly for Slytherin as they had for Gryffindor. Neither of the opposing Houses reacted in a negative fashion except in a few cases that were obviously meant as a joke. None of the animosity that plagued his own playing time surfaced.

Sarah smiled at James. “I wish the ‘Puffs were playing. I missed all of our matches last year.”

James gave her a lazy smile, “I am sure we can work something out.”

“That would break Uncle Jimmy’s heart to have to go to more quidditch matches with you, Ms. Underhill!” Tommy added with a cheeky grin.

James felt his face turn red as he turned a mock glare on the boy. The glare never phased the boy. He could see the amusement in his “uncle’s” eye. Sarah turned a bit red too and covered her smile with her hand.

The whistle announcing the start of the match distracted them. James watched their tactics and compared them to the style he was accustomed to seeing. The brooms were much slower than any broom Harry ever used in a match. James estimated a top speed of only 80 miles an hour, or less than half the top speed of his Firebolt. The Snitch seemed much slower also.

The slower speeds led to a tighter game with players flying in much closer formations. The game took much more of a planned pattern than seen at Hogwarts in the 1990's. In James's opinion, this did not make the game less interesting or exciting, it just provided a slightly different flavor.

Another item James's noticed was the play seemed too clean to be Gryffindor and Slytherin. It seemed more Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff playing. Slytherin's Black and Malfoy performed the only patent fouls. Overall, James felt it was one of the cleanest matches he ever witnessed. Friendly matches at the Weasleys had more fouls.

The match lasted for about 90 minutes. James spotted the snitch on two occasions hovering over the pitch. Gryffindor was up 150-90, when Gobbson of Slytherin caught the snitch. Although Slytherin won by 90 points, James believed both teams were evenly matched and the victory could have gone either way.

James watched in surprise when both teams grounded and shook hands after the match. When Harry played Madam Hooch sent the two teams in opposite directions to prevent any possibility of fight of some type occurring. The Slytherins looked to be giving the Gryffindors a hard time but in a sense of friendliness.

What caused the souring between the two Houses by the time James Potter arrived at the school? Did Voldemort cause that much damage during the first war?

The crowd started to move out of the stands. Various stands had been set up outside the pitch. A fair type atmosphere existed with food stands mixed with games, a Thestral ride (Hagrid would be thrilled.) and boat rides on the lake.

Sarah wrapped her arms around James's arm as they walked out of the pitch. Tommy held Snuffles leash and walked along James. James looked down at Sarah and smiled.

The afternoon passed in a quiet enjoyment of the mini-fair. Third year students and above had Hogsmeade weekend every weekend except during Quidditch weekend. All of the students, James learned, attended the post-match fair. Students were everywhere in groups, many with mixed Houses.

An announcement called for the start of the Dueling Clubs exhibition. James, Sarah and Tommy stood near the students from the Dueling Club. Many people pressed in around the raised platform to watch the duels.

The duels started with a pair of Fourth year students and then moved up the age and skill levels. James enjoyed the matches friendly atmosphere and the mocking comments many of the competitors threw back and forth at each other.

James was much less impressed with their skill level. Any of the MoM gang as Fifth years would have won any of these matches. Harry trained them for real duels and battles, not friendly competitions or affairs of honor. (James was shocked when he learned many wizards still used challenges to settle arguments.)

"Do you think they are good?" Sarah asked James during a break. Two Seventh years had just finished. A Slytherin James recognized as being the Malfoy from the Quidditch match was the victor.

"They seem like they are having fun."

A man's voice next to James commented, "You don't seem impressed by their skill, Mr. Evans."

James turned to face an older wizard standing next to him. James heart skipped a beat when he recognized him as Thomas Potter. "Good afternoon, Mr. Potter. I believe they are skilled enough. The wizarding community here has enjoyed a long period of peace. Their skills are not needed for survival, merely for sport."

“True,” the older wizard commented. “What would you say it there greatest weakness?”

“Instinct. None of these students have faced a real battle where you don’t have time to consider your moves. Training takes over. You must have worked out your strategy before battle is joined. 80 of the battle is decided before the first wand is drawn.”

Mr. Potter nodded. “Interesting points, Mr. Evans. I never considered that. You should consider the next match. One of the Seventh years will be dueling the Charms professor.”

James couldn’t help smirking, “Merlin help the student’s homework if he wins.”

Sarah thumped James’s shoulder as Mr. Potter roared with laughter.

“Mr. Potter, my I introduce you to my girlfriend, Sarah Underhill. Sarah, this is Mr. Thomas Potter.”

Mr. Potter kissed Sarah’s hand, “It is very nice to meet you, Miss Underhill.” Looking at James, he said, “Please call me Thomas.”

James smiled at his grandfather and replied, “Thank you, please call me James.”

Thomas smiled and pointed back to the dueling platform. “Tell me what you think of this duel and how it compares to a real fight.”

The Professor MacTavish, the Charms professor, paired off against a Seventh year Ravenclaw. After the judge counted down they started with standard probing spells. They allowed their shields to handle the various hexes and curses. For the most part they exchanged spells on a one-for-one basis.

James commented to Thomas on the opponents lack of movement, formality and lack of imagination. Rather than dodging curses they never used any footwork. They took turns in their spell casting and used the same spells in the standard way.

In his concentration on the match, James failed to pay attention to the rest of the audience standing around him. They had fallen silent listening to the young wizard give an expert commentary on the relative strengths of the two duelers. Rather than sounding like a run of the mill backseat dueler, James used the “professor” voice developed over many sessions with the DA. The quiet, yet authoritative voice drew the surrounding crowd’s attention.

Sarah looked at James in mild surprise. James had told her some things about his life prior to arriving in Hogsmeade, but the depth of his knowledge surprised her. After getting to know James for the last six months, Sarah was beginning to learn to read his emotions. She heard pain hidden behind his dry commentary.

Tommy, however, looked around and grinned at the people listening in. Tommy secretly watched his uncle train at night after his bedtime. When training, Uncle James moved in a deadly fashion Tommy found comforting. Tommy knew no one would abuse him while Uncle James was near.

One listener did not appreciate the comments James made.

“Shut your mouth, braggart! Like a mudblood like you would know anything about this!”

James turned to face the speaker. ‘I really should not be surprised,’ James thought. The speaker was definitely a Malfoy. The platinum blond hair and arrogant sneer was a dead give away. James was unhappy to note the acceptance of the use of the term ‘mudblood’ by the surrounding crowd, including his grandfather.

James kept his face passive and merely raised an eyebrow. “That would be half-blood.”

“Even worse, one of the pure lowered themselves to bed a mudblood. A half-blood abomination”

“Mallica Malfoy.” Thomas Potter supplied in a quiet voice. “He is a member of the Wizengamut and the Hogwarts Governors. Thinks we should go back to medieval times with the purebloods being the nobles. I believe the student is his nephew.”

James acted as if he did not hear Thomas's comment. A Malfoy causing trouble. Typical. "My comments were meant for Mr. Potter. I answered his question."

The sneer grew larger. "Like an abomination like you would know anything about it!"

James sighed internally. Was there something about him that caused the Malfoy family to ignite? James realized that a fight was coming if he wanted it or not. Getting into it with a Malfoy, while emotionally satisfying, would not help anything

Not wanting to be drawn into a public confrontation, James turned to Sarah, "Lets go, dear."

James started to lead Sarah and a wide-eyed Tommy out of the area, when a new voice called out to James, "I challenge you, sir. I call you a coward and a bragarrt!"

James stopped and sighed. Why did they always try to push it? No wonder Draco was such an idiot. He had generation of bad genetics to overcome.

Sarah placed her hand on James's wrist. "You don't have to do this."

James nodded, "Yes, I do. If you don't stand up to bullies, they keep coming after you."

James turned and looked at his challenger. It was the younger Malfoy. In a lazy voice James asked, "And you would be?"

"Abraxus Malfoy Do you accept my challenge?" the arrogant pureblood asked in a condescending tone.

James could not keep a very large grin from appearing on his face. James remembered Draco trying to mention his grandfather, Abraxus to Professor Slughorn. Slughorn put him off, mentioning he was surprised to hear the older Malfoy died of Dragon Pox. "Very well. If you insist."

The next fifteen minutes passes in a whirlwind. The Malfoys quickly badgered the headmaster into allowing the duel to occur using the Dueling Club's platform. They convinced him it was a friendly match, nothing serious.

James kissed Sarah, winked at Tommy and stepped confidently onto the platform. The younger Malfoy made an arrogant tactical mistake in challenging James and forcing the duel to occur immediately. Abraxus Malfoy played a Quidditch match as a Beater and already fought one duel. Also, James watched his previous match and had some ideas about the boy's skill. Malfoy fought a completely unknown opponent.

James decided to finish the fight quickly enough to show Malfoy was hopelessly outclassed, but without showing too much of his true power.

Malfoy stepped to his position as James assumed his. The Seventh year looked enough like his grandson to cause James a sense of déjà vu.

The judge introduced herself at Professor Galeta Merrythought. James remembered her name as the last DADA professor to hold the post for more than one year. She held it for thirty years already if James remembered right.

"This is a friendly exhibition match. Nothing that causes permanent harm or Dark Magic. Agreed?" After James and Abraxus nodded, she counted, "Then on three. One... Two... Thee... Fight!"

James waited as Malfoy fired a Reducto curse at him. James simply stepped aside, allowing it to pass. Malfoy immediately cast a standard defensive shield. Then he waited for James counter. Then he waited some more.

James grinned at him and gave motioned with his free hand. 'Come on' it said.

Malfoy's face grew red as the mockery. He dropped the shield and yelled, "*Stupify!*"

James dropped, allowing the spell to pass harmlessly past him again. In his professor voice, James started to address the crowd.

“Observe Mr. Malfoys’ casting stance. Not one muscle is out of place. He is holding himself perfectly at the prescribed angle. His knees are slightly bent to absorb impacts on his shield.”

James again stepped aside as two more spells passed harmlessly by. “Mr. Malfoy also maintains a nice amount of power in each of his spells. His wand movements are crisp and precise, allowing the maximum transference on magical energy via the wand. This allows more power in the spell and prevents the waste of his magical energy.”

From the look on Malfoy’s face, he was getting frustrated. James had yet to cast a single spell and never took a single hit from Malfoy. The crowd sensed the mismatch but enjoyed the scene presented. James sounded like a teacher giving a class demonstration rather than the participant in a challenge duel.

“Using one’s imagination in a duel is just as important. For example...” Malfoy cast another Stunner. James cast his first spell of the duel. A simple rock appeared in from of the spell, absorbing its energy.

James continued, “Using Transfiguration to create objects to block spells can be very effective. They can also be used like this...” James cast another spell. Malfoy quickly cast a shield but the blue ball of light stuck just in front to the shield, hitting the platform. The platform iced over under Malfoy’s feet. He slipped and ended up on the ground laying on his back.

The crowd laughed as James grinned, “I used to use that spell for creating ice slides in the summer into a pond.” James cast another charm instantly turning the ice into steam leaving the platform dry.

Malfoy climbed to his feet in a fury. He quickly cast several curses and hexes at James. James ducked and dodged them. Each dodge brought him closer to his opponent. Reaching striking range, James ducked a last curse, spinning his body and kicking out with his legs. When his legs were swept out from underneath, Malfoy flipped onto

his back. James's follow-up kick to the chest was redundant as Malfoy was already unconscious from the fall.

James stood and addressed the crowd. "Finally, never discount the possibility for a Muggle-style attack. Muggles fight well. They make up for their lack of magic with other gifts. They have lessons to teach us if we are willing to learn."

James could tell this ending made the crowd uneasy. Seeing a wizard knocked out by a Muggle-style attack bothered most of the observers on a deep emotional level. James mentally shook his head and then bowed to his opponent and then the crowd. As he stepped off the platform, the elder Malfoy and a mediwitch moved to assist the unconscious boy.

Tommy bounced on his feet with a grin as James approached him. James grinned back and winked at his ward. James glanced at Sarah and saw shock and disbelief on her face.

Something must have shown on James's face because she instantly wrapped him in a hug. She whispered into his ear, "You were incredible. Relax, everything is fine." Then she kissed him lightly on the mouth.

When James and Sarah separated, James noticed Thomas Potter, Professor Merrythought and Professor Dumbledore standing nearby. He also noticed a young Auror standing nearby he recognized.

"Good afternoon, Auror Moody. Did you enjoy the show?"

Moody nodded in an enthusiastic, puppy dog way. "Yes, sir. It was nice to see your work again." James simply laughed.

Professor Merrythought spoke next, "Mr. Evans, that was one of the most interesting duels I have observed in all my years of teaching. You defeated my best student dueler with two spells, one a Fifth year transfiguration and the other a First year charm. Simply incredible!"

Professor Dumbledore agreed, "I most interesting use of Transfiguration in a duel. I have rarely seen that tactic. Where did you learn it?"

James had to suppress his response hard. 'I learned it from watching you, professor,' is what he wanted to say. Instead, he said, "I witnessed a wizard block a Killing Curse with a chunk of summoned marble. A conjured rock will do just as well for lesser curses."

The two professors appeared excited by this answer. They glanced at each other with curious expressions on their faces.

Thomas Potter grimaced. "You made an enemy for life with the Malfoy family. They will never let this go."

James shrugged, "I don't see I had much choice, Thomas. I tried to walk away. If I did not beat him now convincingly, he would have challenged again. He will challenge again, but it will take much longer to occur now."

"But he has your measure now," Thomas commented.

"Does he?" James asked with a slight grin. "All he really knows is I am hard to hit and can create ice and rocks. Oh, and kick like a mule."

"You showed him you are a master of this arena," Professor Merrythought commented. "He may choose to attack in a different arena."

"Probably," James agreed, "but not in this one. I came to England for peace and quiet, not dueling a young idiot who thinks I insulted his family honor by honestly critiquing his cousin's duel."

Thomas grinned. "I like that. James, would you be available for dinner some night? I would love to have you at Potter Manor. Your ward and lovely lady friend would be welcome to join us and my wife."

James glanced at Sarah and nodded, "We would be happy to accept. Sarah is a student Healer so we may not always be available."

Thomas waved that away. "I will send you a couple of dates by owl post. You can select the one most convenient for you."

James thanked Thomas for his invitation and said his goodbyes to the professors. James decided it would be a good time to leave before anything else happened. Calling Tommy and Snuffles over, James and Sarah turned for Hogsmeade.

As they started to walk away, James heard Professor Merrythought saying to Dumbledore, "He may be exactly what we need, Albus."

James cringed internally. "Why does this always happen to me?"

James tossed a handful of Floo powder into the fire and called out, "Potter Manor!" and stepped into the fire.

James landed in a heap on the floor of Potter Manor. Tommy and Sarah stood laughing with their hosts Thomas and Elizabeth Potter. James looked up at them with a grimace and said, "I hate using the Floo."

James stood out and shook Thomas Potter's hand. Then James turned to the witch standing next to him. "It is nice to meet you Mrs. Potter. I am James Evans."

"It is nice to meet you James. Please call me Elizabeth."

James studied the couple in front of him briefly. These were his grandparents. As little as he ever knew about his parents, almost nothing but their names came down to him about his grandparents. Now he was standing in Potter Manor with them!

James glanced around and said, "You have a beautiful home. Has it been in your family a long time?"

Elizabeth smiled proudly, "It has been in Thomas's family since the 10th century. It was rebuilt in 1750 and upgraded in 1905."

James looked around with unfeigned interest. Potter Manor burnt to the ground three months before his birth. It was the third and final time his parents defied Voldemort. By that time, his grandparents had already died of old age.

James already knew Thomas Potter attended Hogwarts with Albus Dumbledore. This made him about 90. Elizabeth seemed only slightly older looking than Professor McGonagall, so he placed her age at 80. For magical people this was late middle age. Since James Potter would not be born until 1960, it explained why they died before Harry James Potter was born.

The older couple led James, Sarah and Tommy on a tour of the house. It was an incredible house. James thought about how different his life would have been growing up here with his parents. James started to feel his grip on his emotions slip until he started using his Occlumency exercises.

Thomas turned to his wife and said, "Why don't you take Sarah and Tommy down to the Sitting Room? I would like to show James my office and library."

Five minutes later, James was sitting in a comfortable chair with a glass of very old Scotch in a large spacious office lined with a variety of different book titles. Above the desk sat an unmoving painting of Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin. Thomas smiled as he notice James studying the painting.

"They say the painting used to move and talk to you like a normal painting. My great-uncle Michael told me it moved when he was a little boy."

James said, "I have never seen a painting of the Hogwarts Founders together."

Thomas agreed, "To the best of my knowledge, this is the only one."

"I am surprised that Hogwarts has not asked for it to be moved to the school."

Thomas grinned, "They have. Just about every time Albus sees it he mentions it should be hanging in the Great Hall at Hogwarts." Thomas paused and then asked, "May I ask you a personal question?"

James smiled slightly, "You can ask. I may not answer."

“Why did you react so strongly to Malfoy’s use of the term “mudblood”?

James grimaced. “My mother was a Muggle-born witch. In school she was known as the most gifted Charms student in many years. One of my best friends in school was also a Muggle-born witch. Even her detractors admitted she was the cleverest witch of our generation. The Muggle-born can be just as powerful magically as the oldest pureblood family. They simply don’t know the ins and outs of wizarding culture.”

“Do you know Muggle technology and science, Thomas?”

Thomas indicated he did not.

“When you were a child, Muggles used horses and sailing ships for their transport. Candles were used for lighting. Their weapons improved to rifles, but they were relatively slow to fire. Today, they have aircraft flying the Atlantic, electricity has led to the light bulb, telephones, and recording devices. Muggles have told stories for centuries about magic. They are using their science to make the same effect our magic gives us. They are going to pass us. I will bet you they will place a man on the moon within 40 years.”

Thomas had a look of someone in deep thought. His face seemed conflicted as he considered the arguments that conflicted with several long held beliefs.

After a couple minutes of a comfortable silence, Thomas placed his glass on the antique table next to him. “James, I am going to be honest with you. You have interested several different parties within the magical community since your appearance in Hogsmeade.”

James nodded unsurprised. “I have had several indications, especially since my stupid duel at Hogwarts. A couple has been the Malfoys looking for a weakness. Also the Ministry and a few I am sure were yourself and probably Professor Dumbledore.”

Albus walked into the room with Fawkes on his shoulder. He looked at James with interest. “Does that bother you?”

“Frankly, it annoys the bloody hell out of me. I came here for privacy and peace. Not to get involved in political maneuverings,” James answered looking at his old Headmaster.

“I wish this was simply the normal political issues. You were raised in the Muggle world. Do you still follow events there?”

James nodded and took another sip of his Scotch.

Thomas explained, “In Germany, the Nazi party has gained power. The Muggles thought the Great War would end all wars in Europe, but this one seems to be developing into a doozy.”

James knew where he was going but he had to play this out. “Why would the wizarding world care about a Muggle war?”

Thomas said, “I almost think that is a rhetorical question. Have you heard the rumors of a Dark Lord named Grindewald?”

“A few.”

“Albert Exechial Grindelwald attended Hogwarts with Albus and myself. Albert, Albus and I were the leaders of the school our last two years. I was the Gryffindor Quidditch captain, prank master and social director. Albert ran Ravenclaw. If you needed something researched, Albert was your man. Albus, of course, ran Slytherin. For magical power and planning, Albus was king.”

James choked on his Scotch. “You were in Slytherin?”

“Didn’t you know?” Albus asked.

“No, I didn’t,” James replied. Then under his breath, James said, “Boy, does that ever explain a bunch!”

“After leaving school, Albert took a position researching ancient scrolls. He started learning some ancient magics. A review board in the Department of Mysteries determined the magic was too easily turned to Dark uses. They insisted the research stop immediately.

Albert refused and fled the country with some of his research. He became obsessed with pursuing his studies with no hindrance from 'small minded worms'."

"What does this have to do with Hitler and the Nazis?"

Thomas answered, "Everything, I am afraid. Grindelwald approached Hitler and fed his ambitions. Grindelwald knows he cannot penetrate the Department of Mystery's security on his own. He plans to use a Nazi invasion of Britain to move us out of the way."

James looked up at the painting and asked his host, "What do you need me for?"

"You are the closest thing to a war wizard we have found. Britain has not seen a Dark Lord since Tybolt was slain in 1789. The old training remains only in books. No one with real experience remains. We know the story you have told of your past. We found no records anywhere of a recent wizard war. However, you have extremely strong mental shields and obviously a great deal of magical combat training."

"So, you need a trainer?"

"Yes," answered Dumbledore.

"Now that is ironic," James said before taking a much larger sip. Albus and Thomas exchanged glance over this cryptic comment but James did not provide them with any more information.

"How do you know you can trust me?"

Fawkes let out a trill of Phoenix song. He flew off of Albus's shoulder and circled the room, still singing. He landed on James's shoulder.

Albus and Thomas looked shocked. Albus said, "This is my friend Fawkes. He is a Phoenix. If you had been Dark you would have reacted with something other than the smile you now wear."

James smiled at the phoenix. Quietly, James murmured "Hello Fawkes. Keeping Albus out of trouble still? Burn any good books lately?"

Fawkes let out a little trill that sounded remarkably like a chuckle and pecked James lightly on the ear.

James looked back at the two older wizards. "Let me see what you have on Grindelwald. I will talk to Sarah and Tommy in vague terms. Then I will give you my decision."

Thomas rose and said, "If you would excuse us, I would like to talk to my colleague." At James's agreeing nod, they left the room.

"You play a dangerous game, young one."

James looked up at the comment and into the eyes of Godric Gryffindor. Salazar Slytherin stood next to him watching James also.

"Who are you? This is not your time," Salazar hissed.

"James Evans."

Godric frowned, "Who are you really?"

"I was born Harry James Potter on 31 July 1980."

Salazar nodded at Godric. Godric looked at James/Harry. "You were foretold in prophecy."

"Another bloody prophecy?" James groaned.

One born of the House of the Lion,

Gifted as Heir of the Snake,

The last chance to redeem the Snake,

And Heal the rift to save all,

Born of the sign of Taranis,

He shall suffer and loose all

While winning

Then gamble all to win all,

If the task fails, Darkness will

Prevail forever.

James felt like pounding his head on the wall. All he wanted was to be normal. Was that too much to ask?

The door opened and Thomas and Albus stepped in. Thomas said simply, "We agree."

James nodded, "I will give you an answer within three days. May I come tomorrow to look over your materials?"

Thomas agreed that was acceptable. "I suggest we rejoin the ladies and your ward for supper."

James enjoyed the dinner with his grandparents. Asking a couple of questions about the house and its history unlocked a number of stories from Potter Family history he never heard before. James particularly enjoyed spending time with Elizabeth Potter. The witch had a clever wit and a mischievous glint in her eye. James could see where James Potter received his Marauder genes.

With Tommy yawning, James and Sarah said their thanks to their hosts and Floo'd back to Hogsmeade. In short order Tommy asleep in bed curled up with Snuffles..

James spent the next two days visiting Potter Manor. He reviewed a great deal of information about Grindelwald. Professor Binn's History of Magic class skimmed the details of the fight with the Dark Lord Grindelwald.

As James had learned the previous night, Grindelwald was a Ravenclaw. His NEWT scores slightly surpassed Hermione's scores. Although a pureblood, Grindelwald did not have any particular issues

with Muggles. Rather he did not consider them at all. A Muggle life was worth less than a House-Elf in his opinion.

His family was not dedicated to either the Light or the Dark. Not a particularly large family, they tended to be either researchers or magical artisans. They apparently had an Unplottable estate in the Jersey Islands. Some of the family also lived on the Normandy coast of France.

Grindelwald's power level did not compare favorably to Voldemort. Voldemort used various rituals and potions along with the Horcruxes to increase his power and decrease his vulnerability. Grindelwald however, may be even more dangerous to wizarding society.

Voldemort wanted to control magical society as a dictator. His pureblood supporters would have been his upper class. Grindelwald sought to destroy the entire society so he could continue with his research into the Darkest Arts. James learned that the scrolls Grindelwald sought dealt with the ancient art of summoning and controlling demons. If the demon broke free of its bonds, it would be free to destroy everything in its path. Grindelwald literally sought to create Hell on Earth.

James needed to talk with Sarah. Getting involved in this would drastically change his plans for spending the next 8-10 years in this time.

James sat down on the couch next to Sarah. He took her hand and said, "Sarah, we need to have a serious talk."

Concern came to her face, "What is wrong, James? You have been very distracted."

James looked into her beautiful blue eyes, and then he looked down. "I need to tell you the whole truth about where I came from and why I am here."

"You haven't told me the truth so far?"

"I haven't really lied, just left out major portions of the story. Just let me tell you and then you can ask your questions."

There was a Dark Lord named Lord Voldemort. He led a his followers of purebloods to attempt to seize power. A prophecy stated that a recently born child would have the power to destroy him. Voldemort attacked and killed his parents. Then he cast the Killing Curse at the infant. Because of ancient blood magic used by the mother, the curse reflected on the wizard, destroying his body.

The boy grew up in a Muggle household, never knowing about magic until he received a letter from his school. They called him the Boy-Who-Lived. He was a poster boy for their society. Eventually the dark wizard returned in a new body and the war started again. The boy eventually defeated Voldemort but lost everyone he ever cared about.

A wizard came up with a plan. It was a last chance effort to change history and save thousands of lives. The young wizard would travel back in time and killed the Dark Lord as an infant, preventing the war from ever occurring.”

“James, you are scaring me. What are you trying to tell me?” Sarah looked very pale.

“I lost my teachers, my friends, my love. I had nothing left to live for. So I came here, even if it left me no time to go back to. I had to take the chance to save them.”

Sarah inhaled sharply with tears forming in her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“The magic will summon me back 10-12 years after I arrived here. I don’t know what will happen then. I will accept whatever happens if it saves everyone else.”

Sarah squeezed James’s hand, “Who are you really?”

James smiled slightly, “I have been happier as James Evan than I ever was before. I was born in 1980 as Harry James Potter. The Potters are my grandparents, although I never met them before.”

“Oh, James. I don’t know what to think of this. Did you kill the Dark Lord?”

“Um, kind of. I hope I killed the Dark Lord but saved the child. He is asleep in his bed right now.”

Sarah sat back in shock, her face pale and her hands drawn up to her mouth. “Tommy?? He couldn’t be like that! He is too good!”

“You saw him after the orphanage. That would have continued until he was seventeen. Anyone could turn Dark in that situation.”

“You adopted the man who murdered your parents and friends?”

James shook his head, “No, I adopted Tommy. Tommy will grow into a powerful wizard. I just want to give him a chance to turn his talents to good.”

Sarah sat quietly for several minutes. James wished he could tell what she was thinking. Instead, he just waited for her to talk.

“I don’t know what to think about this. Why are you telling me now?”

“Thomas and Albus have asked me to help them fighting the Dark Lord Grindelwald. I have a lot of experience from my fight with Voldemort. I also know roughly how things turned out the *last time* Grindelwald was fought. My friend Hermione once told me I have a ‘saving people thing’. I feel I have to get involved.

I love you, Sarah. I could not get involved without talking to you. I couldn’t do that without explaining why I am getting involved.”

Softly, Sarah asked, “You love me?”

James nodded, “I did not plan it. I only have a limited time before the magic pulls me away. It is not fair to you.”

“James Evans! Or Harry Potter! Whatever your name is, I love you too.” Sarah wrapped her arms around James in a hug reminiscent of a Mrs. Weasley hug. “You are not getting rid of me so easily. I need to work through this and understand it, but I know you. Just give me time.”

James smiled, “A true ‘Puff.’”

Then they kissed. Neither heard a small boy and his furry companion making their way back to bed.

A/N: Thank you to all of the reviewers. I have been stunned by the level of positive response this story has received. A number of reviewers commented that James quickly achieved his goal with reforming Tommy. When has anything ever gone to plan in a Harry Potter story? ;-) Hopefully this chapter foreshadowed some of the issues to face James and Tommy in the chapters to come.

Chapter 6 – Training and Trials

12 November 1935

James stepped onto the dueling platform in the Auror Academy. Twenty Aurors stood in a group at the side of the stage. Most of them had at least five years of experience in their field. This meant all of them were at least in their mid-twenties. Although James himself was not yet twenty, his experience and eyes made them all add ten years to him.

Professor Dumbledore and Thomas Potter convinced the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to sponsor a series of advanced dueling demonstrations. The two wizards used several known Dueling Masters for previous sessions to teach advanced spells and dueling tactics to the Aurors. Today would be James's first demonstration.

James smirked slightly to himself. He remembered his career counseling in his Fifth year with McGonagall and Umbridge. Although Harry did have several instructors who were Aurors, events kept Harry from every attending the Academy. Now here he was preparing to teach a class.

"Good morning. I am James Evans. I am here today in order to lead a discussion on magical combat. We will have demonstrations today, but I also want this to be a two-way class. If you have questions or comments, please bring them up during the session."

A burly Auror standing in the middle of the crowd with his arms crossed called out, "Why should we listen to you? What makes you an expert?"

James nodded calmly at this outburst. The question was expected. "My first taste of combat occurred at age eleven. Can anyone define for me the difference between dueling and combat?" James picked a familiar face out of the crowd. "Mr. Moody, care to take a shot."

The young Auror looked surprised to be called on. "A duel occurs between only two people?"

“Is that a question or an answer, Mr. Moody?” James smirked internally. It was a lot of fun to throw Moody’s future self’s own comments back at him. Was that a paradox?

“Yes, a duel is only between two people. However, combat can be also. The primary difference deals with the rules. In combat, there is no code of conduct. Nothing is out of bounds. You must be prepared for all possibilities.”

James stepped off the stage. He looked at the Auror who initially challenged him. “Your name sir?”

“Auror Michael Tomlinson.”

James waved his hand at the platform. “Mr. Tomlinson and Mr. Moody, please take your places on the platform.”

The older and larger Auror grinned at Moody and moved into position. “Let’s play, Alistair.”

Once they took their positions, they both assumed classic dueling stances. “Begin” Harry called out.

The two combatants started with the classic shielding spells followed by probing attacks. Although more advanced than the spells and techniques James saw at the Hogwarts duels, it was much the same.

Two quick Stunning Spells ended the duel.

James stepped past the two bodies on the platform. “What just happened?”

An Auror in the back called out, “You cheated! You stunned them during their duel!”

“I cheated? By what rules?” James turned and with a flick of his wand woke the two Aurors. “Get up!”

The two Aurors jumped to their feet. “Why was I able to stun you?”

Tomlinson sneered at James. “You hit us when we were fighting.”

In an flat tone, James asked, "Tell me Auror Tomlinson, do you expect your opponents to allow you to fight in neat pairings? You must be prepared. CONSTANT VIGILANCE! You must be aware of your surroundings and prepared to react at all times."

James motioned for the two Aurors to join their fellows. Alistair Moody glared at James as he stepped off the stage. James grinned at him, "Get down there, Mad-Eye. I've been glared at by better."

After the two Aurors rejoined the group, James addressed them, "I have faced true combat conditions more then twenty times. I have had all three of the Unforgivable Curses cast against me. While I have never used the Killing Curse, I have killed several Dark wizards and creatures during battles. I was fifteen during my first full battle. Six Fourth and Fifth year students were caught by a dozen adult Dark wizards and witches. We held long enough for help to arrive. No one died that day."

James's voice contained no emotion now. He sounded like a man discussing the weather. He concluded with, "Of those six students, I am the only one left alive. We were thrown into a situation where we learned or we died. Why should you listen to me? Simple, I am the survivor."

The Aurors looked stunned at this information. Glances shot amongst the group. Somehow, they did not doubt the young wizard in front of them. His calm confident stance soothed many of their doubts. For more then one hundred years, the Auror Corps served as the magical community's investigators. More akin to the Muggle Scotland Yard then solders, these men were very experienced at reading witnesses and suspects. All of their instincts told them that James knew what he was talking about. An aura of grim implacability hung on the young wizard.

When James first mounted the dueling stage, he gave the air of a genial, slightly goofy young wizard. Talking about his past brought a new mask to the fore. The genial man was gone. Instead, a tested warrior looked at the Aurors. This was not a man to be taken lightly.

James continued without a pause. "Today we will discuss several basic combat scenarios. Many will be drawn from battles I have

fought in or my teachers did. I have changed the terrain to reflect areas you are familiar. The Ministry, Hogwarts, Hogsmeade and Diagon Alley will be included.”

James snorted to himself. Actually, the battles would be presented exactly in the locations they occurred. It was not as if James could explain that the battles would occur between 1977 and 1989. That would hurt his credibility.

“For the practical portion of the afternoon, you will team up in three man teams to experience a taste of what you would expect in a true combat environment.”

Unobserved in the back of the room, Thomas Potter stood with Head Auror Anthony Abbott. Within the bubble of a *Silencio*, the Head Auror asked, “Do you really think this is necessary, Thomas?”

Thomas Potter nodded but kept watching the class. James had conjured an image on the wall of a map with symbols representing the combatants and bystanders in a Diagon Alley scenario. “I am afraid I do, Anthony.”

“Why would Grindelwald attack here after all of this time? He has lived hidden in Eastern Europe for the past forty-five years. Why now?”

Thomas shrugged, “He still wants the scrolls. He must need them for something dark. Now he has his puppet running Muggle Germany. We are not exactly sure where Dumstrang is, but I know it is somewhere in the German or Austrian Alps. The German ministry has always maintained close relations with their Muggle opposites. Much closer then we do in England. Their Muggles started rebuilding their military in March. I am afraid our wizard war is going to spill into the Muggle world.”

“Do you really think it will get that bad?” Anthony asked. “We haven’t had Muggles get involved in our arguments since the Spanish and English wars in the 1500’s!”

Thomas grimaced. “I think that is exactly the model Albert is using. Lead a Muggle force to invade England to push aside any magical

resistance. We would either have to give way or allow our existence to become known.”

Anthony turned white. “Do you really think that is what he has planned?”

Thomas nodded, “Albus does. They used to play strategy games together. Albert loved to feint and use his weaker forces to screen his strength. Then he would strike to finish off his opponent quickly. The Nazis and their leader, Hitler, are merely his pawns to screen his magical strength.”

Anthony motioned to where James taught his seminar. “Does this bloke know what he is talking about? Do you trust him?”

“He beat the Malfoy heir without breaking a sweat. You know what a fanatic Mallica is for dueling. His son is the Hogwarts champion. James made him look a novice. He won’t talk about his background much, but he is a master.”

“But can we trust him?”

Thomas shrugged. “Fawkes likes him, actually landed on James’s shoulder. Also Elizabeth likes him too. Says something about him makes her want to mother him. He is dating a Hufflepuff healer and adopted a orphaned boy. In addition, he founded the Phoenix Foundation.

“He started the Phoenix Foundation?” Anthony turned back to study the young instructor. “I like what they have done, but we have not been able to figure out where his money came from?”

Thomas Potter turned and looked at his friend. “Why are you looking into it?”

“A request from the Minister. Someone raised a concern that they would misuse the children in their care.”

“Sounds more like the Malfoys, Blacks and the rest of their crowd are upset over James making the Malfoy lad look bad.”

Anthony Abbott nodded, "Possibly, but I would still like to know where his money came from. We can't get much from Gringotts. Apparently he showed up in June of '34 with a trunk full of Galleons to open a vault. No records exist of him before then. My experience tells me that Evans is not his real name."

Thomas shrugged, "Possibly he changed his name to avoid retribution. If even part of his stories about fighting Dark wizards is true there has to be some still out looking for him."

"Maybe Thomas. Maybe."

Three hours later the seminar wrapped up with a combat challenge. James allowed Tomlinson to select four other Aurors to fight. Unsurprisingly, his team did not include the young Alistair Moody.

"Come on, Mad-Eye. Bring on of your mates with you."

Moody glared at James and gestured to another Auror. They walked to the opposite side of the dueling platform.

James poured pumpkin juice into cups for all of the fighters. "Gentlemen, I suggest you have something to drink. This fight will continue until only one side remains standing." Earlier James activated a toy from Weasley Wizard Wheezes. The toy caused the air to dry out and the room temperature to slowly rise. As a result all of the Aurors on the platform gratefully drank the pumpkin juice. After they drank, James offered the rest to the others in the class.

Once they were done, James moved to his referee's position. "Gentlemen, ready?" At nods from both ends, James yelled out, "Activate!"

All of the Aurors in the room locked into position. None of them could move. James walked calmly over and picked up his stuff, preparing to leave. As he reached to door, James turned back and addressed his frozen class. "Never except a gift from a potential adversary. Be prepared to utilize every advantage in combat and seek to avoid giving your opponents any advantage. **CONSTANT VIGILANCE!**" Then James turned and walked out of the room.

A moment later, he popped his head back into the room. "By the way, the Petrification Potion should wear off in about an hour. Remember this lesson. Nice meeting all of you."

James walked out of the building using all of his Occlumency skills to maintain his composure. Once out of the Academy, James fell against the wall holding his sides and laughing. The look on Moody's face! James remembered Moody using the same trick when training Harry and his friends the summer after his Seventh year.

James recovered his composure and proceeded to the Apparition point. Before he left he murmured, "That one was for you, Ron."

31 December 1935

Tommy's ninth birthday arrived during a heavy snowfall in Hogsmeade. Tommy spent the whole day outside with Snuffles and his broom. This was Tommy's second birthday in the wizarding world. Last year it had been only James and Tommy celebrating the day. Now Sarah and Snuffles joined them at the table for his birthday dinner.

James smiled at the young boy who had come to mean so much to him. Tommy looked up from his dinner and started to smile back. He stopped and looked back down at his dinner. James frowned at Tommy's behavior. Why was the boy acting this way? He had been growing distant for months. He was almost as reserved now as when he first arrived in Hogsmeade.

Tommy still acted normally around Sarah and Elizabeth Potter. Both witches noticed a change in Tommy whenever he realized James was around. Neither could explain his behavior nor get Tommy to talk to them about it.

James reached under the table and set a package in front of Tommy. "I know you already opened your birthday presents this morning, but I saw this today and wanted to add it."

Tommy reached for the wrapped gift when it jumped slightly. He cast a slightly worried look at James.

“Don’t worry, it won’t hurt you.”

Tommy shrugged and ripped off the paper. (Tommy was a ripper. Why wrap it if you can’t have fun opening it?) For the first time in weeks, Tommy’s face lit up. “Uncle Jimmy!”

Sarah had the opposite reaction. “James Evans! I can’t believe you bought that for him!”

James used to think it was a Weasley female thing to yell like that. Maybe it was all women. Or maybe just women he was attracted to. Not that it really made a difference right now.

“It is a children’s version dear. The Snitch moves at half speed. The Bludgers move slower and are filled with Hippogriff down as cushioning.”

“Why do we encourage children to play a sport where it is expected someone gets seriously hurt?”

‘Uh,oh,’ James thought, ‘now she is channeling Madam Pomfrey.’ Aloud he said, “Because it’s fun?”

By the look on her face, James knew he made a mistake. A voice in his head yelled, ‘INCOMING!’ James spent the next fifteen minutes listening to his girlfriend lecture him on the dangers of Quidditch. James figured it was worth it to hear Tommy suppressing his giggles.

Sarah finally stopped when she noticed James wink at the red-faced Tommy. She turned her frown on him but could not keep her own lips from curling up at the sight of the nine-year-old attempting to hold in his giggles. That was enough for Tommy to lose his fight. His infectious, uncontrollable laughter filled the dining room of the cottage. James and Sarah started to laugh with him.

Snuffles, who was now large enough to stand eye-level with the table top, stood up from his nap to see what was so amusing to his humans. Their loud noises woke him from a pleasant dream of chasing down a large rabbit. After watching them a second, Snuffles curled up by his master’s feet again. ‘Two-legs are weird,’ the dog decided as he returned to his sleep.

James walked into Tommy's room while he was preparing for bed. The young boy was reading a book James bought him a few weeks previous. It was "The Time Machine" by H.G. Wells. It impressed James that Tommy almost completed the novel already. It would not be an easy read for a just nine-year-old.

"Good evening, Tommy."

Tommy looked up from his book. "Hi."

"Tommy, can we talk a bit?" James asked standing in the door.

Tommy shrugged but did not say anything. James took that as a yes and stepped into the room. James sat in a chair across from Tommy's bed. When Tommy first arrived here from the orphanage, James sat in the chair rather than make Tommy uncomfortable by sitting on his bed to talk to him. It was almost a full year before Tommy offered to allow James to sit on his bed. It was one of the happiest moments of James's life. Something made James revert to the chair tonight.

"You have been a bit distant lately. Is something wrong? Are the kids in the village bothering you?"

Tommy shook his head, "No."

"Well, I would say nothing is wrong with Snuffles. He ate all of the chops off my plate last night. Seemed fine then." Snuffles looked up and gave a doggie grin at the mention of his name.

'Never should have let Tommy name Snuffles after Padfoot. I swear the dog is a Marauder.' James thought.

Unaware of James's mental observation, Tommy answered, "No, Snuffles is fine."

"You seem fine with Sarah. Did I do something to bother you?" The silence answered James's question.

"Tommy, can you please tell me what is wrong?"

Tears started to form in Tommy's face. He rolled over, placed his face in his pillow, and started to cry. James stepped over to the bed and gently placed his hand on Tommy's shoulder. Tommy shook it off. James stepped back as Tommy whirled around.

"Don't you touch me! You are just like the people in the orphanage! You hate me!"

A wave of magic slammed into James, knocking him back into the chair. The chair flipped over, slamming James's head into the wall. Then the room went black.

James heard a voice calling his name. He struggled to wake up. He realized he was cold. "Sarah? What happened?"

"I heard Tommy screaming at you and then Snuffles started to howl. I came to see what happened. I found you here and Tommy's window open. I think he left on his broom. I didn't see any tracks in the snow."

James struggled to stand up. "James, be careful. You might have a concussion."

"Wouldn't be the first time. I have to go find Tommy." James noticed Snuffles standing looking out the window with a sad look on his face. "Relax, boy. I'll bring him back."

The look on Snuffle's face said, 'You better.'

James ran into his room and opened his locked trunk. Since Tommy arrived in the house, the trunk was opened very rarely. It contained Harry Potter's things from the future. Anything that had not yet been invented or written was stored in this trunk. The prank used for the Auror training session was almost the only thing James had removed since his arrival in this time.

James pulled out the Firebolt. James's Cleansweep was a great broom for this time, but it was nothing compared to Harry's Firebolt. Throwing on his robes, James cast a quick warming charm.

Sarah caught him heading out the front door. "James, it is a blizzard outside! How will you find him?"

“Don’t worry. I will. Be back in a tic.” James ran out the door and mounted his broom in mid-stride. In a heartbeat, he was gone.

James flew to the south end of the village. Bringing his broom to a hover in the shelter of a tree, he pulled out his wand. “Point me.”

Taking a bearing off the wand, James moved east for the village a bit. He repeated the process and headed for his destination. A tailwind pointed in the same direction. James kicked himself. He should have guessed. Tommy was headed for Hogwarts.

Between the speed of the Firebolt and the tailwind, James made it to Hogwarts in record time. Sheltering in the shadow of the Quidditch stands, James used his wand again. It pointed past Hogwarts and towards the lake. That really scared James. Now he flew like a man possessed.

Rocketing towards the lake, James noticed a broom on the ground near the lakeshore. Snow from the blizzard was starting to cover it. James flew down near the broom and called out, “Tommy! Where are you!” with a Sonorous Charm.

James called repeatedly, his heart in his throat.

A slight slackening in the wind brought a faint sound to James’s ears. Turning in that direction, James called out, “*Accio Tommy!*”

Out of the darkness and snow a small wet huddled mass crashed into James’s waiting arms. Pulling the boy in close, James turned his broom back towards the Quidditch stands.

Tommy was mumbling to himself softly as they flew. Don’t kill me. I am sorry. Don’t kill me.” It broke James’s heart to hear this. A dreadful suspicion rose up in his chest.

Once he reached the shelter of the stands, James hovered the broom and used his wand to cast drying and warming charms. Noticing Tommy had lapsed into unconsciousness, James turned the Firebolt for home.

James did not take the direct route home. The wind now fought against him. Also, he did not want the wind to make Tommy any colder than necessary. So James dashed from shelter to shelter, winding his way back through Hogsmeade and back to the cottage. This trip seemed perversely much longer and much shorter than the trip out.

Eventually, James landed in front of his house. Opening the door, he was greeted by a very happy dog and a very worried girlfriend.

“Tommy!” Sarah grabbed Tommy from James and carried him into his bedroom. Before James even got his winter cloak off, Sarah banished Tommy’s cold, wet clothes and slipped him into his bed. A series of warming charms were quickly cast around the room. Snuffles did his part by curling up happily on top of Tommy’s legs, his head resting on Tommy’s stomach.

James entered Tommy’s room to find his ward snug in his bed with a huge dog resting on him and a beautiful woman singing softly in his ear. For a second, James almost felt jealous.

The next morning the blizzard had blown itself out. Nearly a meter of snow covered the valley containing Hogwarts and Hogsmeade. The brilliant sunshine made everything look peaceful and clean. A perfect way to bring in 1936.

James woke when he heard Tommy stir in his bed. Sarah sat with Tommy most of the night. James sent her to bed in the guest room at five o’clock when he woke up.

James stepped up to the bed. “Good morning, Tommy. How are you feeling?”

Tommy shrank back a bit into his pillows and mumbled, “Fine.”

James chuckled, “I used to say the same thing. My friends said that what I meant was, ‘I am not dying.’ I drove them crazy.”

Tommy made no sound in response.

“Tommy, did you over hear me talking to Sarah the night we went to the Potters for dinner? Don’t be scared.”

Tommy slowly nodded his head.

James sighed. “How much did you overhear?”

Tommy mumbled the name “Voldemort”

“Tommy, this is a very complex situation. Can I tell you a story?”

Tommy nodded, not taking his eyes off James.

“Before I was born a Dark Lord rose up. His name was Lord Voldemort. He hated everything to do with Muggles. So much that he even hated wizards and witches who were Muggleborn. He wanted to take over the magical world and keep all of the Muggleborns out.”

“My parents joined a group to fight against him. My father was a pureblood but my mother was a Muggleborn witch. Then a prophecy was made that linked me with stopping Voldemort. He killed my parents but my mother sacrificed herself to save me. He failed to kill me. He gave me this scar on my forehead.”

“I grew up with relatives who hated me and anything to do with magic. It was much like your orphanage. My cousin was much larger than I and he beat me many times. Eventually I got my Hogwarts letter and learned I was a wizard. I loved Hogwarts and made great friends there.”

James trailed off for a moment, lost in his own memories. Tommy kept silent, just watching.

“I fought Voldemort returned. I fought him and his followers all through school. Many wizards and witches on both sides ended up dead. All of his followers died and so did all of my friends and teachers.” Tears formed in James’s eyes at this point.

James looked at Tommy. “I won but I lost everything. Do you understand that?”

Tommy nodded, his own eyes filling up.

"I learned away to come back here and kill Voldemort as a baby. I saw killing an innocent baby as a fair trade to saving thousands of lives. But it did not work that way. Instead of a baby Voldemort, I found you, a wonderful little boy. I saw your pain in the alley, but also your bravery and determination."

"But what about your friends?" Tommy asked in a small voice. "Don't you still need to save them?"

"Tommy, I already killed Voldemort. We changed each other. I love you. Sarah loves you. I know Mrs. Potter loves you." James lowered his voice and leaned in slightly, "She keeps asking me if she can keep you. I keep telling her no!"

Tommy giggled a little at this. It made James feel much better.

"Tommy, the choices we make define us. The Tom Riddle who became Voldemort in my time never knew love or a happy home. We actually had very much in common. Do you know what I think it came down to in the end?"

Tommy shook his head.

"I knew my parents loved me. They died to save me. I always knew that someone loved me. He never knew that."

James looked at Tommy, and then wrapped him in a large hug. "I do love you, Tommy Riddle. As you get older I will tell you more, but I think that is the worst of it. I don't want to keep secrets from you but I think you need to be older to be able to understand it."

James leaned back from Tommy. "I will tell you everything before you leave Hogwarts. Remember this for now. You have the ability to be a great wizard. You will be very powerful. But only you can choose how you will use that power. Understand?"

Tommy smiled shyly and nodded.

James grinned back. "Great! Now we can talk about your punishment for scarring Sarah and I last night!"

"Uncle Jimmy!"

Being called Uncle Jimmy again almost got Tommy out of trouble. "No, Tommy. There has to be a consequence for running away."

Tommy looked contrite, "Yes sir."

"I am glad you agree. Your punishment is... I get to throw the first snowball!"

Realizing James had been playing him, Tommy let out a yell. "Agghh, you're teasing me Uncle Jimmy! Why don't you and Sarah go have some more kids so you have someone else to wind up?"

A breathy voice from the door agreed. "I like that idea."

James turned to see Sarah standing in the door in her dressing robe. He was completely gob smacked. "Really?"

Tommy and Snuffles made a quick escape to the kitchen before the adults came back to their senses. Breakfast was calling. Tommy could smell bacon.

James stepped over to Sarah and wrapped his arms around her. "Are you sure?"

Sarah placed her cheek and James's shoulder. "Yes, I am. I know the magic will pull you back eventually. I don't want to waste any more time. I know there is a war coming. You won't be able to stand by and do nothing. I could lose you even before the magic takes you. I can't risk it."

James smiled and slid onto one knee. "Sarah Underhill, will you marry me?"

Tears forming in her eyes, Sarah answered, "Yes, of course I will." Sarah smiled as James stood up. "Now we have to tell Tommy."

Suddenly a snowball flew through the door, smacking James in the head.

“Tommy!” James roared.

Running feet and giggling was heard as Tommy ran out of the house and into the snow. Snuffles was right behind him.

“Guess he already knows,” Sarah laughed.

James mocked-whined at his new fiancé, “But I was supposed to get the first snowball!”

James flew to the Hogwarts entrance the next day. He had requested a meeting with Professors Dippet and Dumbledore. Landing the Cleansweep in the yard, James shrank the broom and placed it inside his robe pocket. (The Firebolt was back in the trunk.)

Entering the school was a weird experience for James. Not much of the school had changed, or rather, would change to Harry’s time. From his previous visits, James knew all of the portraits were the same. All of the ghosts were the same also except for Myrtle of course. To James’s surprise, Peeves was no where in sight.

Before Voldemort fell, all of Hogwarts lay in ruins. A magical implosion curse demolished the Ravenclaw and Headmaster’s Towers. The Gryffindor Tower survived that attack only to be struck with a Stone Melting Curse five months later. Twenty First and Second year students were caught in the molten heat of the melting tower. In a strange twist of perversity, half of the students were the children of known or suspected Death Eaters. The theory was Voldemort did not realize the Tower changed to house the entire body of First and Second year students, rather than all of the Gryffindors.

When James first visited the school in this time, it gave him chills. Now it was like visiting an old friend. The memories did not fade in the last two years to James. Passing the spot where Ginny died still brought a lump of sadness. James hoped she would be happy for him marrying Sarah. The Harry from the future never could have hoped for the happiness the James of the 1930’s knew.

Stepping into the entry hall, James naturally glanced at the House Points displays. Ravenclaw was in the lead, but all of the Houses were within a hundred points of each other.

“Ah, James. Right on time I see.”

“Hello, Albus. I hope you had a nice Christmas holiday.”

The Transfiguration professor nodded and smiled. “I do wonder why you sent me socks.”

James grinned, “An old teacher of mine once complained he always received books for Christmas when what he really wanted were some warm wool socks.”

“Indeed, I have noticed the tendency as I age to receive more and more books. I think I can understand his comment. He sounds like a wise man,” Dumbledore smiled.

Now James really grinned. “Actually I could never decide if he was mad as a hatter or crazy like a fox. He did this annoying eye twinkle thing that made you think he was always laughing at you or knew something you didn’t.”

Albus laughed at James mental picture. He could tell James loved his old teacher and the comments were really meant in jest. “Do you ever see him still?”

‘You mean, aside from right now?’ James thought. Aloud he said, “No, he was murdered by someone he trusted in front of me. He placed me under a Body Bind jinx and put an invisible cloak over me. So I could watch it happen but was powerless to stop it.”

“I am sorry to bring up a bad memory, James.”

James smiled, “My good and bad memories are so tied together that it is almost impossible to bring up one without the other.”

The pair reached the base of the Headmaster’s Tower. The gargoyle had not changed. Albus gave the password (It was a flower.) and the

two wizards ascended into the office. Albus knocked on the door and a voice called out, "Come in Albus and James."

'So it is a Headmaster thing,' James thought.

Stepping into the office, James noticed Thomas Potter with two other men James did not know. They seemed vaguely familiar.

"Nice to see you James," the headmaster greeted them. "Do you know the Blacks? This is Sirius and Acturus."

James froze for a second, then placed his hand out, "Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to meet you."

This Sirius Black resembled his great-grandson, the godfather of Harry Potter. In his late fifties, this man had the same build and hair as Padfoot, but a confident, commanding manner that Padfoot lacked. Maybe if he stayed out of Azkaban, Harry's Sirius would have been the same.

Acturus Black was around thirty and slightly shorted and thinner than his father. He lacked the presence of his father. Probably living in his shadow so long kept him from standing on his own.

Headmaster Dippet commented, "Sirius is on our Board of Governors. He stopped in to visit the school and wanted to meet you."

James turned his attention to the elder Black. "You have created quite a stir. Your Phoenix Foundation raised some eyes, but your seminar for the DMLE caught a lot of attention."

James smiled, "They were really not taking the topic seriously when I started. They won't until the first time they really need it. The survivors will listen."

Thomas Potter raised an eyebrow. "That seems remarkably cold blooded."

James shook his head, "No, experience and history. Whenever a society, magical or Muggle, experiences a long peace or advancement in technology or magic, they become complacent in

their preparedness. They ignore their warnings until it is too late. Then they curse the messenger.” James grinned, “Sometimes they take that last part literally.”

Acturis asked in a quiet voice, “Do you think war is inevitable?”

“Are you talking about the one brewing in Germany? Yes. I don’t think our Aurors can take Grindelwald’s trained Dark wizards now. With Germany building up their army, I think Grindelwald will bring the war to England.”

“Really,” Acturis sneered, “I think you know nothing about which you speak. A team of our finest Aurors is already on their way to arrest Grindelwald like the common criminal he is.”

The elder Black kept silent, observing.

James shrugged, “I pray you are correct and I am wrong.”

“But you don’t think so, do you?” Thomas asked.

“No, but there is always hope.”

The headmaster frowned, “Unfortunately, you are correct, James.”

The rest of the room turned to look at the headmaster.

“Excuse me?” James asked.

“I received an owl early this morning that the team was captured in Berlin. Their wands were snapped and they were sent to a place called Dachau, near Munich.”

James went white as he recognized the name of the camp. “Do you have a plan to get them out of there?”

“That is up to the ministry,” the headmaster answered.

‘If the Ministry did not get their team out soon, they would all be dead,’ James thought. “I think they should be encouraged to.”

Headmaster Dippet waved his head, "I am sure the government can be trusted to handle the situation more than adequately."

James sighed. 'No wonder Voldemort was able to manipulate this guy so badly he got Hagrid blamed for opening the Chamber.'

The Blacks soon rose and made their goodbyes. Acturus made no more comments except a mumbled good-bye. Sirius Black shook James hand and said, "I look forward to seeing what you do next young Mr. Evans."

After they had gone, the headmaster asked, "Now how may I help you, James?"

"I would like to have access to the library. I need to do a bit of research."

The headmaster leaned back in his chair and asked, "What kind of research?"

"Are you familiar with Muggle aeroplanes?"

"Mildly, we see them from time to time. Flimsy looking things."

"The Muggles are improving them to be stronger and faster. They can fly long distances and drop explosives. The orphanage is in downtown London. I want to research a Muggle bomb repealing ward to protect the site. Diagon Alley and St. Mungos could use it too," James explained.

"Do you really think that could happen?" Albus asked.

James nodded, "I think it is highly probable."

Everything James said was true. However he also wants to research the Time Turner spell Aberforth used to send him here. James wanted to see if there was a way to stop it from taking him back to 1998.

The professors exchanged a glance. The headmaster nodded, "I think we can do that. Would you be willing to do us a favor in return?"

Professor Merrythought would love to have you as a guest speaker in her class.”

James smiled, “I would be happy to. Thank you.”

“You seem in a good mood this morning, James,” Thomas commented.

James grinned at him. “Sarah and I got engaged yesterday.” After the three men congratulated James, James turned to Thomas, “I would like to ask a favor of you also.”

His friend and unknowing grandfather smiled and said, “For the groom, name it!”

“Would you allow Sarah and me to get married in the garden at the Potter Manor?”

Thomas smiled, “I think Elizabeth would have words with me if I said no. She is quite taken with you and adores Tommy. We would love to have you at the Manor.”

“Thank you, Thomas. I appreciate this more than I can ever tell you.”

The men continued to talk for another hour about idle things. Shortly before lunch, an elated James Evans left Hogwarts. Soon he would marry the woman he loved in a place that every Potter man married since the 10th century. If Ginny had survived, then Harry would have been the first to break that chain when he married.

A very happy James Evans made his way home to his soon-to-be-wife and adopted son.

A/N:

Below is a brief timeline for the events in Europe from James’s arrival leading up to the start of WWII (1939).

1934

June – Night of the Long Knives

August – Hitler becomes the Fuehrer

1935

March – German re-armament starts

September – German Jews lose civil rights

1936

March – Germany occupies the Rhineland

July – Spanish Civil War starts

1937

November – Hitler reveals plans to his generals

1938

March – Germany announces Anschluss (unification) with Austria

August – German army mobilizes

September – British PM Chamberlain appeases Hitler

October – Germany invades the Sudetenland

November – Kristallnacht

1939

March - Germany invades the rest of Czechoslovakia

August – German-USSR non-aggression pact

September 1– Germany invades Poland

September 3 – GB & FR declare war

September 17 – USSR invades Poland

November – Assassination attempt on Hitler

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Chapter 7 – Behind Enemy Lines

June 15, 1936

James sat on the bench in the German beer hall. Sitting in a back corner, James felt surrounded by the boisterous crowd. To the outside observer the large, blonde-haired man seemed to be enjoying himself. Internally was a different story.

‘How in Merlin’s name did I let myself get dragged into this?’ James thought. ‘This is not my war! I did my duty. I should be at home with Sarah and Tommy.’

The reason for James’s unease sat four tables away. Three men in matching black trench coats formed an island of calm in the crowded beer hall. They did not do anything overt to cause this pocket. It was simply who they were. Gestapo

Actually, if you wanted to get technical, only two were Gestapo. The third man was a wizard. He was one of Grindelwald’s men. Grindelwald called his followers the Dark Army. To those outside the Gestapo, Dark Army members made up a special unit that operated on special cases. Charms performed on the Muggle members of the Gestapo ensured they would never talk about the magic used by the members of the Dark Army.

A primary difference between Grindelwald and Voldemort lay in their tactics. Voldemort used terror and guerilla attacks to take attempt to take control of magical Britain. Grindelwald used open-warfare with Muggle proxies doing much of the fighting and dying. The Dark Army provided wards and magical protections for the rebuilding Wehrmacht. Grindelwald’s forces were not yet ready to make open war. Although many in the magical community knew the Dark Lord’s ultimate goal, the various nations’ magical ministries felt it was best to appease him for now.

The German MoM selected Grindelwald as Chancellor in 1932. How an English-born wizard became the German Minister of Magic was a mystery to James. Already known as a Dark Lord before his election, Grindelwald moved quickly to consolidate power ‘for the good of the magical community’.

His ally, Hitler, mirrored Grindelwald's rise to power. Some in the British MoM believed Hitler was under an Imperius Curse. A team of Aurors did manage to get close to the Muggle leader at a Nazi rally. A wizard used Leglimancy and soon determined the Muggle was not under any magical control. He and Grindelwald were simple two evil men. Now their bullyboys worked together in their common cause.

Waiting calmly for an hour after the Gestapo men arrived, James casually rose from his seat. Taking his leave of his drinking companions, James walked out of the beer hall. James kept his Occlumency shields up as he past the three men. Using a trick he stole from Snape, James kept his cover persona on the outside of the shields. If the Dark Army wizard could use Legilimancy all he would read is a Muggle laborer's thoughts about getting home after drinking all night.

James never felt the tell-tale brush of Legilimancy. He kept the act up all the way to the Gasthaus he was staying at during his mission. As he made his way through the cool Munich spring night, James thought to himself again, 'Why did I agree to do this?'

Flashback: April 20, 1936

James sat in his office in the Phoenix Foundation reviewing a series of plans provided by Mrs. Catchbottom. James smiled fondly. The old witch ran the Foundation like it was her own domain. Since the witch was so competent it scary, James was happy to let her. The staff was happy and ran smoothly. The children seemed very happy also.

Every magical or squib orphan in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland had been offered a place in the orphanage. Professor Dippet allowed Mrs. Catchbottom, an old acquaintance, to review the Hogwart's Registry for any orphans, even the ones not attending Hogwarts due to age or any other reason. Several orphans from the Continent also moved over when they heard about the magical orphanage.

The Registry recorded the birth of all magical children. It tracked their locations while living within the British Isles. The Registry generated the Hogwart's letters sent to children on their 11th birthday.

Almost every magical orphan now resided at the Phoenix Foundation's orphanage. Only one Hogwarts Sixth year declined. James gathered the young wizard was in love with a Muggle girl in a local village and did not want to leave her.

James was amazed and saddened how many magical and squib orphans there really were. Many of the magical orphans were Muggle-born. Their Muggle families were unable to deal with their "freakishness" and abandoned them. The squib orphans were the reverse. Their pureblood families were embarrassed by having a squib in the family. The ones that really infuriated James "did it out of kindness" so they would not grow up jealous of their magical family.

Four hundred children from newborns to seventeen called the London orphanage home. It was actually more children than when Tommy was placed here. Another two hundred children of the primary school ages attended the magical day school. Mrs. Catchbottom gathered a team of House Elves for cooking and cleaning. The floors were magically expanded to provide more space than the outside would suggest.

Gathering the House Elves had been an experience for James. James found himself missing Dobby. Dobby was very excitable but he was also very devoted to Harry. He appreciated Harry's attempts at simply being Dobby's friend. The new elves however were freaked out by James's kindness to them. They were happy to be bound to the orphanage but acted terrified when James offered them a salary, clothing and days off. James figured he would work on them. In an unusual action for the usually silent founder of the Phoenix Foundation, James issued a memo stating that any employee mistreating a House Elf would be fired, and any student would be punished. James also prohibited the House Elves from punishing themselves.

James felt content. He and Sarah married on February 28th at the Potter Manor. Tommy served as James's Best Man. James snorted thinking again what Ron would have made of that development. Actually, Draco's reaction might have been even more amusing.

The wedding was a small event. Only Professor Dumbledore, the Potters, Sarah's closest friends and Mrs. Catchbottom attended. Sarah's mother refused to attend because of James's "half-blood" status. The old witch objected when they started dating, so the couple was not surprised.

Having his grandparents at his wedding made the day extra special for James. Growing up with no family, he never expected to get married with family in attendance. Tommy tried to do the day by putting a big bow around Snuffles neck. The disgusted look on the dog's face brought peals of laughter to Tommy all through the reception.

A knock on his office door brought James out of his memories. "Come in!" James called.

An attractive woman in her mid-forties entered the office. "Two men are here to see you, Mr. Evans. They don't have an appointment, but they are quite insistent."

"Send them in, Elizabeth," James smiled. Then he mock-yelled at her, "And I told you to call me James!"

The woman smiled and said, "I would not want your wife to think the wrong things!" Then she was gone. James just grinned at her back.

A moment later, she returned with two men in Muggle clothing. Some part of James recognized them as wizards, but he had rarely seen non-Muggleborn wizard wearing Muggle clothing that correctly or comfortably.

James rose to greet them. "Gentlemen, I understand you asked to speak to me?"

One of the men glanced at Elizabeth. "May we speak to you alone?"

James glanced at Elizabeth and nodded. The secretary quietly stepped out of the room and closed the door.

"Please be seated."

The men sat in the indicated chairs while James sat back behind his desk. James asked, "What may I help you with?"

The man who had not yet spoken drew his wand and cast privacy charms. James did not recognize the charms. Then he turned to James and said, "Please put your wand away, Mr. Evans. We are just here to talk."

James put his wand away but kept the Portkey in his hand hidden from view. He could be gone with a word. "Again, gentlemen, how may I help you?"

"We represent the Ministry. We need your skills on a mission of national importance."

James leaned back in his chair and considered the two wizards. Both men were mid-sized and dark-haired. Neither man had any remarkable features or identifying marks. "What do the Unspeakables need with me?"

The men did not react to James's identification of their department. "You have attracted our interest Mr. Evans on several levels. You apparently arrived here on June 16, 1934 in Hogsmeade. We can find no record of your existence anywhere prior to that date. No entry permits, no bank records, nothing.

You deposited almost 20 million Galleons with Gringotts, bought a house and started this Foundation. You also adopted a young boy. You took your NEWTS and managed to impress Madam Marchbanks. You made enemies of the Malfoys and befriended the Potters and Professor Dumbledore. You also made an impressive dueling presentation to our law enforcement brethren."

James kept himself neutral during this presentation. "They did not seem very impressed."

The wizard allowed a small smirk to violate his face. "You rubbed their noses in their weakness. They are used to criminals fear to keep them from fighting back."

James simply nodded at this observation.

The silence lasted for several seconds. Then the second wizard spoke, "You have admirable self-control. You also have the strongest mental shields I have ever come across."

Again, James simply waited.

"We would like to recruit you for a mission," the first wizard commented.

James raised an eyebrow, "A mission?"

"The Ministry sent a team of Aurors to Germany to arrest the Dark Lord Grindelwald. The Ministry assumed twenty Aurors could handle one Dark Lord. They never even got close to him."

James nodded, "I heard about the failed attempt. I also heard they were sent to Dachau. That was at Christmastime."

Neither wizard seemed surprised at James's knowledge. "We would like you to join a team to extract them."

"Why me?"

"You have the skills necessary for an Unspeakable already. Your dueling skills are very impressive. You can also blend in with Muggles with ease and understand their world. You have tight mental shields and keep your secrets well."

The other wizard added, "We also can help you with some research you have been doing."

"Ah, the carrot," James snorted.

"Yes," the Unspeakable acknowledged. "You have a ready made cover. No government would sponsor an agent to appear a philanthropist. You would live your own life and only respond to specific operations that would require your skills. We would also ask for you to help train other Unspeakables."

James considered this. Mentally placing a bet, he asked, "And what is the stick?"

“A temporal disruption occurred near Hogsmeade. On the very day, you arrived there, in fact. We can’t have people mucking up the timeline now can we?”

James narrowed his eyes slightly.

The wizard added, “One of the main purposes of the Department of Mysteries is to watch for dark wizards attempting to change the past. We noticed your arrival and watched. Something about the signature of your arrival held us back.”

Suddenly, James burst out laughing. “That was where he got it! Aberforth Dumbledore is one of you!”

The second wizard nodded, “His signature on the disruption told us he approved your trip. We will not ask why, although we assume it had something to do with the boy. It is also another reason why we chose you. Aberforth is an excellent agent. If he selected you for an assignment, you must be capable”

James snickered, “It also explains why my former Headmaster was able to acquire a TimeTurner for a Third year student looking to take some extra classes.” The Unspeakables looked shocked for the first time. That seemed a frivolous use of such a magical item. James grinned at their first rue response since entering his office.

Then James asked, “What do you know of the spell Aberforth used to send me back here?”

The first Unspeakable shrugged, “Honestly, no we don’t. We don’t have the magic today to duplicate his feat. Our furthest back to date is two weeks.”

The second Unspeakable asked, “Have you considered the implications of your actions?”

His fellow agent waved the question away. “Now is not the time for that conversation. It always makes me want to have a drink in my hand.”

James nodded his agreement but mentally reminded himself to have that conversation later. "Obviously, I cannot talk to my wife about this," James commented.

"True"

"Who else would know about my status?" James asked.

"No one outside the DoM. By the way, we pronounce it doom. An inside joke."

"Are Unspeakables allowed to have a sense of humor?"

The two Unspeakables glanced at each other. Then one answered, "We laugh at the rest of the Ministry all of the time. It keeps us sane."

James murmured, "Well, we have that in common anyway." Looking at the two men, James said, "I will have to think about it, gentlemen. I have fought my war. I am not sure I can go back into another one. I just want a peaceful life."

The two Unspeakables rose from their seats. "Please don't think about it for too long, Mr. Evans. We have twenty Aurors counting on us to get them out of Dachau." The wizard who cast the privacy charms brought them down again. "We will be in touch, Mr.s Evans." Then he dropped a small piece of parchment on James's desk. The two wizards walked out.

James picked up the parchment. It was a list of the twenty Aurors captured by Grindelwald. Glancing through the list, James noticed several familiar names from his training seminar. Then he reached a very familiar name, Alistor Moody.

James cursed himself. He was going to Germany. Damn his 'saving people thing'!

The following weeks passed in a blur.

The original two Unspeakables from his office met James on his first morning. They Portkeyed into a secure conference room. They provided James with a plain grey robe and a silver necklace.

One of the two wizards explained. “The necklace protects your identity when you are outside the DoM. No one outside DoM will know of your status. You will sign a magically binding contract to prevent you from ever disclosing another Unspeakable’s identity without their permission. You will also not be able to discuss DoM assignments or magic without permission from a supervisor-level Unspeakable.”

James nodded. “I understand. Would that mean you are both supervisor level?” he asked in an innocent tone. His only reply was a smirk.

“We will be using you as a ‘floater’. This means you will be assigned to different teams depending on mission needs. You will need to choose a codename to be used within the Ministry.”

James thought for a second. After Harry became an Animagus, Mooney gave Harry a Marauder name. “My friends gave me a name; I would like to use that. They called me ‘The Count’.”

The two Unspeakables seemed surprised by the odd codename but had no objection to it. James spent the next five hours being briefed on the workings of the Department of Mysteries.

Before they left, the first Unspeakable said, “You may call me Able,”

The second chimed in, “And I am Cain.”

The next day, James went to the Ministry to work with the rest of the extraction team. The team James would be working together for more than five years. The team leader was known as Alex. The other team members were Bill, Charlie, Don and Fred. (Ed was lost on an earlier mission.) James snorted when he met the team. It sounded like something out of one of Uncle Vernon’s Cold War spy novels.

James examined his new team. Alex was a tall, blonde man with a runner’s build. Bill appeared his exact opposite; short, dark and bulky. Charlie was the only female on the team. The petite brunette’s looks and manners screamed of a pampered, pureblood upbringing. Something about her made James convinced she was the most dangerous of the team. Don would have been called a science geek

in another time. Instead, he was adept at enchanting objects and ward-breaking. Skinny and pale, Don looked like he spent too much time in the research lab. Fred was an older wizard who looked like a librarian. He seemed very fussy about his clothes.

Alex approached James first, "So you are 'The Count'? Where did that come from?"

In a bland manner, James answered, "Teaching little children." 'Ha, let him catch that reference!' James thought.

Alex smiled at the non-answer. "We'll just call you Vlad." Alex turned to the rest of the team. "Everyone, meet the Count."

James nodded, "It is nice to meet you all."

Bill asked, "They sent us a newbie? Kid can't be more than eighteen years old! This mission is too dangerous to be held some snotie's hand."

James looked at the Unspeakable and allowed part of his aura to show. "I have been actively fighting Dark wizards since I was eleven. I killed a Dark Lord at seventeen. I agree, I am not a secret agent. I am a soldier. I am also a bit older than I look."

Fred placed a calming hand on Bill's shoulder, "I beg your pardon, forgive my friend's rudeness. We lost a long-time team member recently and it is unusual to get a replacement just prior to a mission."

For all of his polite tones, James could tell Fred was nervous also. "I understand. I am the last of my team. I know what it is like to see team members lost."

Alex interrupted, "The Count was recruited directly into the DoM by Cain and Abel. I have never heard of that before. He was never an Auror and skipped training."

The team members looked at James with renewed interest.

Bill mused, "You must be okay then." He nodded a grudging acceptance.

Charlie walked up to James and wrapped her hands around his bicep. "Ignore them. Welcome to the team."

James smiled and thanked her for his welcome. Her tone reminded James of a blending of Lavender and Pansy. That was not a good sign.

The rest of the morning was spent in a briefing on the mission. James learned that the concentration camp was built on the site of a munitions factory from the Muggle Great War (World War I) about ten miles from Munich. It currently held about 3,000 prisoners. Many of them were Hitler and Grindelwald's political prisoners with Gypsies and homosexuals making up the rest. Excluding the British Aurors, the DoM estimated thirty magical prisoners were held at the camp.

James was surprised to learn that not many Jews populated the camp. A little research of James indicated that the widespread gathering of the Jews would not start for another eighteen months. Right now, the pressure was more social. The only Jews present in the camp today had been convicted of violating the 1935 Nuremberg Laws.

The plan called for the team to infiltrate into Germany in pairs. The entire team would portkey to the Paris as tourists. There they would split up. Alex and Charlie would make their way to Munich via rail. James and Fred would follow on the same path two days later. Bill and Don would go to Switzerland and make their way to Munich via back roads. The team would not use magic unless it was necessary.

Once in Munich, Alex and Charlie would be responsible for gathering intelligence on the current conditions of the camp. The team would assemble at a designated Gasthaus. The team would infiltrate the camp and make their way to where the Aurors were held. The team would provide each of the Aurors with general-use wands. The wands would not be as powerful as their personal wands, but would be better than nothing. Once the team and the Aurors exited the camp and the expected wards, they would Portkey out of Germany.

The next three days consisted of the team preparing for their mission. James and Fred agreed to travel as father and son. Fred was in his mid-forties and James would dress to make himself look younger.

Although James estimated he was almost twenty, he really could still pass as a younger teenager. His smaller size and green eyes made that impression.

A couple rounds of dueling increased the team's respect for James. James held off Alex and Bill for over twenty minutes. James dodged most of the spells fired on him. It ended when James cast a Reducto with a stunner just after it. The first spell hit Bill's shield. The shield held up to the Reducto but had temporarily weakened enough for the trailing stunner to sneak through it. The shield weakened the Stunner enough that Bill never lost consciousness, but it did take him out of the fight.

Holding off Alex and Bill impressed the team. Taking Bill out of the fight surprised them. James did not reveal all of his dueling skills or powers to the team. Intensive training with Moody, Shackbolt and several others played a large part of James's ability. The connection to Voldemort provided the rest of the explanation.

While developing his Occlumency and Legilimancy, Harry learned to enter the Dark Lord's mind. To use the Muggle term, Harry was able to download a great deal of knowledge from Voldemort's mind. Harry spent two weeks in a coma-like state while his mind processed the sudden influx of data. This was the "power the Dark Lord knows not". Fortunately, Harry only downloaded information, not actual memories. Living with the memories of Voldemort's crimes would have been too much.

The influx of knowledge, coupled with Harry's specialized training, made the difference in the Final Battle. In a pure power comparison, Harry had roughly the same power as Dumbledore and Voldemort. However, their gifts took on slightly different forms. Dumbledore was a Master at Transfiguration. Voldemort concentrated on Potions and Dark Magic. Harry's reflexes and magic made him a Master Dueler. The "download" allowed Harry to bypass the fifty-year difference in knowledge. Their differences did the rest.

James returned to Hogsmeade after the final day of team training. The Unspeakable team worked together in a smooth, effortless manner. Each of them knew their responsibilities with little or no

discussion. The team seemed to have accepted James personally, but James could feel where his presence caused a disruption in their teamwork. Bill in particular seemed to resent the disruption. James understood. In the field is not the place to work out the kinks of a new team member.

Alex released the team on Friday just after lunch with instructions to meet back at the Ministry by 7:00 on Monday morning for the first leg of the mission. Although James slept at home all week, he looked forward to spending the weekend with Tommy and Sarah. Unfortunately, only Snuffles was home to greet him.

Sarah was at St. Mungo's working a rotation in the Pediatric Ward. Her time there as a medi-witch served her well. Knowing the various Healers personally helped her move through the Healer program smoothly. Because of this and her previous experience, she would be completing the program in only five more months.

Tommy started taking his lessons at his former orphanage. Now renamed The Phoenix Center, it bore little resemblance to the place Tommy knew. The buildings were cleaned up and upgraded with the latest magical and Muggle conveniences. Many of the completely Muggle children moved to other orphanages as the magical and squib orphans moved in. Tommy used the floo to travel to and from school everyday for the last week. James arranged Tommy's attendance for social reasons. Tommy dealt well with adults. He needed to work well with other children his own age.

Tommy's acceptance of returning to his old orphanage did concern James and Sarah. Sarah took Tommy to visit the school during one of James's meetings. Although Tommy acted nervous before they arrived, he quickly settled down as the changes captured his attention. Not one of the former staff remained from Tommy's time there. Staff hired by the Phoenix Foundation had replaced all of them. Tommy particularly enjoyed the electricity experiment using a Muggle lightning rod connected to a power meter. The teacher used his wand to shoot lightning bolts at the rod.

Making his way into the empty house, James started to pack his trunk for the trip. James pulled out his battle robes and shook them out.

Professor Dumbledore acquired them for Harry's seventeenth birthday. They arrived via owl at Privet Drive just as Harry, Ron and Hermione prepared for their Horcrux Hunt. The dragonhide robes protected from many minor hexes. It would also resist penetration by Muggle bullets or other weapons. The robes could only be removed voluntarily by the wearer or by a designated Healer. A charm on them also prevented the robes from getting caught or tangling up.

James started dinner and then moved to what used to be his potions lab. Sarah took over the lab after she moved in. James thought she equaled Snape in her knowledge (But was much nicer to look at.) James held all of Voldemort's potions knowledge but understood he lacked the flair or instincts that made a true Potions Master. Sarah did have that spark. She was delighted with the complete lab James built, but he quickly conceded ownership to his new wife. (Sarah did look at him a little funny when he mumbled something about refusing to give up the remote though.)

James gathered up an assortment of potions included Polyjuice and healing. The Unspeakables would be issuing the team equipment and supplies. However James wanted to ensure that he had enough. Besides, having some advantages no one knew about saved his life several times in the war with Voldemort.

A chime sounded through the house announcing someone arriving via Floo. Snuffles jumped up from his patch of sun and ran to the living room. James heard Tommy yell out, "NO SNUFFLES!", followed by a loud crash.

James walked into the living room to find the young boy trapped under the large dog. Snuffles was wagging his tail happily and licking Tommy's face. For his part, Tommy was torn between laughing at Snuffle's antics and being angry at the coating of dog slobber he was receiving. James did not feel torn at all.

Tommy did not realize James was home until hearing his uncle's laughter at his predicament. Tommy rolled over and forced himself to his feet. Snuffles backed off and gave Tommy an insolent doggie grin. Tommy's glare bounced right off the furry monster. James laughed even harder when Tommy turned his disgusted glare at his uncle.

“Thanks for the help.”

James settled down enough to answer, “I would never want to get between a boy and his dog.”

Tommy scowled at Snuffles again. “He is not a dog! He is a furry menace. All week when I get home from school he jumps me like that!”

“In a year and a half you will start Hogwarts. Then you won’t have to worry about it.” Tommy brightened at that reminder. At least until James finished. “However when you get home for breaks he may have built it all up.”

Tommy glared at his adopted father but the humor of the situation danced in his eyes. “You are a bad man, Uncle Jimmy.”

James smirked back, “I know. Come on, you can help me with dinner and tell me about your day at school. I stopped at Honeydukes today also.”

Tommy grinned and followed his uncle into the kitchen.

Dinner was a resounding success. James made Sarah’s favorite meal. He finished cooking two minutes before she arrived home. After a long day at the hospital, finding dinner ready was a relief. It also made her suspicious.

“What is wrong, James?” she asked after the meal was finished. Tommy stopped where he was clearing the dishes and looked at his uncle.

James sighed. “I should have known you would catch on. I have to go away for a few weeks.”

“Why?”

“I can’t tell you exactly. I was asked to help out some people in trouble.”

“What kind of trouble, Uncle Jimmy?”

"I can't say, Tommy. I had to swear an Oath." James looked at his wife. "I have to do this. I couldn't say no."

Sarah leaned back in her chair. James could see the conflicting emotions play across her face. "Why you?"

James shrugged, "My background, my experience. It caught some people's attention. They realized they needed some help."

A resigned expression came across Sarah's face. "Does this have to do with that new Dark Lord in Germany?"

James shook his head, "I can't answer that."

"Which means yes." Sarah sighed, "I knew when we married that you loved to act the paladin. You can't sit at home and let things happen. You need to get involved."

"All I want is peace. I don't want to have to do this," James insisted.

Sarah reached across the table and took James's hand. "I know you want peace. But if you smell trouble, you have to go fight it. It is who you are."

James started to shake his head as if to resist her words. Then she added, "Under any name," in a significant tone of voice.

"I think I am supposed to be convincing you, not the other way around," James said with a small smile.

"It just shows who is smarter," Tommy chimed in. Sarah simply smiled.

James groaned, "I am outnumbered. Traitor!"

The first part of the mission passed without incident. The team assembled in a DoM conference room. Dressed in their Muggle disguises, James was impressed with how... normal the team appeared. No one would ever suspect them of being a highly skilled and dangerous team of Unspeakables.

A Portkey took them to a official French entry point. The team divided into its two person elements and went their separate directions. Each stayed at a different hotel except for Alex and Charlie. They made their way to the Muggle train station immediately for passage into Germany.

James had never spent time in Paris in either time. In his role as Fred's seventeen-year-old son, it was perfectly natural for him to tour the city. They did have two days to kill until they started their trip. James enjoyed roaming the canals and museums of the City of Light. He also enjoyed sitting in the cafés watching the Parisians go about their day.

The city had a nervous energy. The actions of Nazi German concerned the common Frenchmen. James often heard comments about it. The people were concerned but maintained a faith in the government to protect them. In 1930, the French government started building the Maginot Line. The line extended along the German-French border. New construction had recently started when Belgium declared itself neutral. The majority of the people seemed to feel safe with the line of forts protecting their border.

James just sat silently and kept his opinions to himself. Who would believe him about how quickly the Germans would defeat the line. Even its detractors figured on a period of weeks or months. The idea of Germany invading the Low Countries first was never even mentioned.

It reminded James of the faith the magical community placed in its government before the second war with Voldemort. Everyone sat back and calmly accepted that the government would win the war and the Boy-Who-Lived would kill Voldemort.

At the appropriate time, James and Fred boarded the train. They were traveling under the identities of Anthony Thomas and his son Michael. James acted the role of a slightly sullen teenager being forced to do something. Basically, he simply behaved like he did in his Fifth year at Hogwarts.

The crossing into Germany passed without incident. At the boarder, German border guards inspected everyone's papers. Although the

guards did not wear the Nazi armband, the banners hung off the customs building.

Neither James nor Fred used any active magic as they crossed the border. Members of the Dark Army monitored the border crossings for foreign wizards. Foreign wizards registered their wands for German Ministry tracking. Tracking charms were often used to follow suspicious visitors. Since they were entering as Muggles, the team needed to slip past the border without attracting any magical notice. All of their magical items, including their wands, were packed into Muggle trunks lined with suppression charms to eliminate their magical signature.

Two of the border guards passed the compartment James and Fred sat in. Fred read a copy of a French newspaper. James was reading a copy of a German tourist guide on the Bavarian Alps. James could feel the magical scan as the guards passed by. One of them was obviously a wizard. James made a subtle motion to warn Fred. Fred passed an acknowledgement. An outside observer would not have noticed the communication.

The train passed smoothly through the German countryside towards Munich. James noticed a great deal of construction everywhere he looked. At one point they crossed over a large road project. James asked the car steward about the project.

"It is called the Auto-bahn. Cars will be able to move quickly all through the Fatherland." James noticed the pride in the German's voice at this pronouncement. As a Muggle-raised, Harry had heard of the German auto-bahn. He had not known it was first built under the Nazis.

James snorted with disgust. 'Something else we should have covered rather than Goblin rebellions in History of Magic. I should have brought some Muggle history texts back with me.'

The train entered the station in Munich without issue. James exited the train and openly stared at everything. As a teenage tourist, he would be expected to do exactly that. The old German architecture was breathtaking. The remains of the old city wall still formed a gate entering the old part of the city. James was finding he enjoyed seeing

places outside of Britain. The only thing ruining this trip was the number of Nazi SS that seemed to inundate the streets.

James and Fred made their way to their designated Gasthaus. They passed the one assigned to Alex and Charlie. They passed it and stepped into another one just up the street. After checking in, they made their way to their room.

Once the door was shut, Fred whispered into James's ear. "A and C did not display the all clear signal."

James looked at the older Unspeakable with a question on his face.

"I will go over tonight to check on them. You will stay here." Fred waited until James nodded his acceptance.

Although he did not like it, James understood. Playing these games of sneaking around was not his greatest skill. The rest of the team trained more on gathering intelligence and completing their mission then magical combat. They prided themselves on completing their assignments without ever having to fight. James was included because they did not expect to be able to get away without fighting this time. He was only here as magical muscle.

The two Unspeakables went out for a walk through town, followed by dinner. Fred then made a show of ordering "Michael" back to their rooms. James played his role of the reluctant teenager, then sulked his way back to the room.

In all honesty, James did not have a hard time with the roll. Fred was excluding him from taking part as a full member of the team. Being ordered back to the room highlighted Fred's opinion of James's inclusion on the mission.

An hour later, James gave thanks he stayed behind. A sudden commotion occurred in the street below. A series of flashes of light appeared in the Gasthaus where Alex and Charlie were to stay.

James left the curtains down on the windows. A glance through a crack revealed a number of German police cars gathering in the

street. James noticed the colors of many of the flashes coming through the Gasthaus window. Most were red, but some were green.

James felt his stomach clinch. Stunners and Killing Curses. Oddly enough, James realized the Light wizard was throwing the Unforgivable. The Dark Army wizards wanted to question Fred thus they were using the Stunners. The flashes all turned green for a moment and then everything went dark in the inn.

James knew there was nothing he could do for Fred. James opened his trunk and put on his battle robes. Then he transfigured them to look like Muggle clothing in the German style. He placed a wand holster on each forearm. Into the holster went his wand and a backup. They were brother wands.

After killing Voldemort, Harry had picked up the wand as a trophy. It symbolized something important to Harry. Some part of his brain also did not want the Ministry getting a hold of it. Those idiots would put it on display. Some new pureblood Dark Lord, looking to take up Voldemort's mantle would acquire it. It would become a new rallying point; a talisman of their fallen dark leader. The wand went into Harry trunk, wrapped in a dirty sock until Harry arrived in the past.

On a whim, James started with dueling with both wands. Casting the same spell simultaneously through both wands allowed James to channel more power into the spell. He could also engage multiple targets at the same time by pointing the wands at separate targets.

A number of potions went into a small pouch on his waist. A special flask went into his pants pocket. Then he gathered up his and Fred's trunks. A shrinking charm saw them stowed quickly into his pockets.

Before stepping out the door, James took a quick drink out of the flask. In a moment a two-meter tall, sandy-blond haired man of about thirty stood. James picked up several hairs from various Muggles during the trip. James selected them for being random body-types, although all of them came from genetic stock the current German regime would not have issues.

The Polyjuice potion in the flask came from a special recipe found in one of Snape's notebooks. The man had been a major git, but he did

know his potions. This formula allowed the user to last for four hours between sips. The advantage was obvious. A user under observation could last far longer than any observer 'knew' Polyjuice should last.

James never figured out why this potion was never given to either Dumbledore or Voldemort. Maybe Snape saved it for his own use. The notebook indicated Snape tried the potion on himself and several unsuspecting Hufflepuffs during detentions. After the test, the Potions Master Obliviated the students of their experience.

James quietly made his way out of the Gasthaus. James stepped into the night street and disappeared under his Invisibility Cloak. Skills learned sneaking around Hogwarts returned. To an observer, James appeared to step into a shadow and never emerge. No one observed his departure to appreciate this skill.

James made his way through the crowded German street. The night spent in the beer hall had proven fruitful. Using one of his remaining Extendable Ears, James overheard the conversation between the Gestapo and Dark Army members in the hall.

It seemed that Alex and Charlie were noticed during a random sweep of the train passengers. Dark Army operatives tracked them to their Gasthaus. They were captured as they approached the concentration camp at Dachau. The German wizards left magic detectors on their room. Fred set them off on his entry. James learned that Fred died from an AK when he refused to be captured. Since their conversation centered on the fight with Fred, James did not hear what happened to the other two team members.

James settled into his bed in a new inn. It dealt with working class Germans rather than tourists. It reminded James something of Knockturn Alley. No one was going to ask questions here.

Bill and Don were not due to reach the area for another three days. When they arrived, the camp was supposed to be completely investigated. James did not know if Bill would continue the mission. With Alex gone, Bill was the new team lead.

'Whatever team there is left,' James thought sarcastically.

James decided to make his way to the camp tomorrow during the day. If it seemed clear he would investigate closer. Maybe by the time the others arrived, James would have the information they needed to decide.

James lay back in his blankets and thought of Tommy and Sarah. He missed being home. A teenage Harry would never have pictured this. Raising the child He-Who-Must-Not-Be-A-Dark-Lord and married. He had a home and a family.

Then something happened James had not felt in a long time. He felt something through his scar. The curse scar given during the murder of his parents had been dormant since the death of Lord Voldemort. But now James felt something.

It was faint. Given the distance, James realized it must be intense for him to feel it all the way in Germany. But this was something James had never felt through his scar before.

It was joy. Tom Marvolo Riddle was happy.

Wondering what was happening back in Hogsmeade, James Evans fell asleep with a smile on his face.

A/N (1): The information on Dachau primarily came from the US Holocaust Museum's web site.

A/N(2): This chapter was not included in my original plan for this story. This chapter is for all of the reviewers who requested more 'Harry v. Grindelwald/Nazis'. The story will continue to focus on the relationship of James and Tommy. It will also include Tom Riddle's Hogwarts career.

Questions for consideration:

1) Why is James's Marauder name The Count? (The next chapter will answer this.)

2) Why is Tommy so happy?

Chapter 8 – The Mission

The old farm truck left the smell of exhaust in its wake. Three dirty farm hands perched in the back as the truck bounced its way down the farm lane. The winding road had been in place for centuries. Farm carts probably cut down this same path in the time of Caesar. The three farmhands did not look around as the truck made its way through the ancient forest that surrounded it. The huge, old trees cut out much of the light anyway.

The truck approached an unseen boundary. A truck bearing the markings of the Wehrmacht sat along the side of the lane. Three young men in SS uniforms stood bored along side the truck. One waved the farm truck to a stop as it approached. The other two never moved from their positions.

The farmer driving the truck called out as the truck rolled to a stop. “Guten Morgen, Rottenfuhrer!”

“Guten Morgen, Herr Adler. New crew of workers? They don’t look too good.” the corporal observed.

“Ya, best I could find. An idiot, a cripple and a Jew. No one else is available. All of the fine German stock has gone into service to the Fatherland. I must make do with what is left over.”

The SS corporal laughed and walked to the back of the truck. He glanced at the only worker in the back who seemed to have any intelligence in his eyes. He sneered as his eyes noticed a yellow Star of David sewn onto his jacket. The corporal looked at the two remaining workers. The first was a dirty man with an obviously clubbed foot, an obvious weakness in his blood. The final man’s eyes contained no hint of curiosity or intelligence. His sloping brow gave him the face of a Neanderthal. Only his obvious size indicated why even a desperate farmer would accept the man.

“You ‘men’ listen up.” The word men was sneered to indicate the SS man’s true feeling. “You are entering a secured area. You will not leave your camp at night. During the day, you will leave only to work the fields. Anyone found out of the permitted areas or at night will be shot.

With a final snort of disgust, the corporal waved the truck on. Draco Malfoy would have been proud of the sneer the SS thug bestowed on his "lesser". The farmer merely waved a combination thanks and good-bye as he drove off.

The truck continued for another five minutes before turning in a small encampment with a barn and farming equipment. Two men exited the barn as the truck pulled to a stop.

The farmer climbed out of the truck and approached the other two men. After a quiet discussion the three men walked to the back of the truck.

One of the newcomers spoke. "You three are here to work. We will work you hard. You will sleep in the barn in the hayloft. Lunch will be provided. You three will take turns cooking for us. Understand?"

The three men in the truck nodded, although the one man may have been nodding just because the others did.

"I am Herr Yoder." Pointing at the other newcomer, he added, "This is Herr Klink. You will listen to us and do what ever we tell you. Otherwise we will kick you out at night and let the SS have you." Yoder nodded to himself. "Now empty this truck and stack the supplies in the barn."

The three men moved to comply. The Jewish man moved quickly to efficiently complete the task. The clubfoot moved with a surprising dexterity moving the supplies. The idiot needed to be prompted for each step. Only the fact he lifted twice the load of the other two men kept him from being turned out of the camp immediately.

Once emptied, Herr Adler climbed back into the truck and drove out of the camp.

The farmers sent the Jewish man and the idiot into a field and told to collect up the rocks that came up over the winter. They told the clubfoot to sharpen the blades of the plows. Then they walked back into the barn to continue their own tasks.

The man with the star on his chest attempted to make conversation with his coworker in the field. The simple man nodded vaguely to

questions. The Jewish man introduced himself as Jonathan Fielman. When asked, the simple man answered with a grunt, "Goyle". Eventually the two men fell into a quiet pattern of work and conversation ceased.

As the sun rose higher in the sun and their muscles started to wear, they stopped for a light lunch. The Jewish man had to keep reminding his slower coworker to drink occasionally.

Late in the day, Herr Klink waved them back to camp. Jonathan pulled Goyle by the arm back to the barn. "Come, my friend. It is time to eat." Goyle merely nodded and smiled slightly.

A thick cloud cover rolled into the area during the evening. After finishing a relatively skimpy meal, the five men in the camp found places to sleep. Yoder and Klink slept in a small shack next to the main barn. The others found places in the stale hay in the barn. Before long, everyone in the camp was asleep.

As he felt the Polyjuice Potion wear off, James Evans awoke in the almost pitch black barn. James quietly made his way through the barn and out of the door. The sound of various night creatures told James no one else wandered the camp in the night. In seconds, James walked out of the camp and into the darkened tree line.

As he walked into the forest, James thanked the long gone creator of the wizard potions he had been drinking all day. The improved Polyjuice potion was definitely a big help. However, the magical equivalent of a Muggle sports drinking enabled "Goyle" to continue working long after his own body felt too tired to move.

Out of sight of the camp, James pulled out his shrunken trunk and spoke the command word to resize it. Moving quickly, James used his wand to remove all of the dirt and odor accumulated during the day's work. Then he donned his battle robes and stuck his wand into his wrist holster. The trunk went back into a pocket.

Joining the work crew was a stroke of luck. It allowed James an excuse to be in the area during the day without arousing any suspicion. Posing as an idiot wearing the form of the (future?)

Slytherin student struck James as funny. Too bad no one else got the joke.

Magically prepared for his reconnaissance mission, James concentrated for a moment. In an instant, he was gone. A large grey wolf stood in his place. The wolf set off in an easy lope through the forest. Where his human eyes perceived darkness, the wolf saw clearly.

The wolf set off at an easy lope through the medieval forest. The ancient trees blocked the light from the quarter moon hanging low in the sky. The wolf's nose told James that no humans or other large predators were in the area. After a day playing the role of Goyle, the wolf's lope felt refreshing.

Harry learned to be an Animagus during the summer after Professor Dumbledore's death. Harry, Hermione and Ron stayed with the Dursleys while waiting on Harry's 17th birthday. (The Dursleys were not happy, but Ron and Hermione could use magic so they kept their objections to themselves.) Professor McGonagall arrived one day unannounced and offered to teach them. Ron never gained the ability. Hermione became a bushy, brown housecat. (Ron made a cheeky comment about the form made sense because Hermione always tried to act like McGonagall anyway.) Harry's transformation came very easy, but its results shocked the Professor and her protégé.

James the wolf ran through the forest in the cool spring night air. During his time in the field, James thought about his rough map of the area and decided where the farm would roughly be located. He estimated the farm and the concentration camp were about 2 km apart. A short and easy run for a wolf.

James felt himself enter under the umbrella of anti-Appartition and Portkey wards. The camp could not be far ahead. He slowed his run into a cautious walk. One of his concerns on the mission was the existence of anti-Animagus wards. Some unobtrusive research in the DoM library indicated those wards did not yet exist. However, just because the British Ministry did not have them did not mean the German Ministry did not also.

James came to the edge of a clearing and heard the sounds of men up ahead. He laid down on his belly. He crawled out slowly so his head was out of the bushes at the clearing edge.

The camp looked very primitive to James's eyes. A double wall of barbed wire lined the camp. 2-meter wide dogs run lay between the two lines of barbed wire. James could smell the dog smell mixed in the stench rising from the camp. Wooden guard towers stood at the four corners of the camp. Searchlights constantly swept the area both inside and outside the camp. The former munitions factory dominated the camp. The rundown building seemed to house the majority of the prisoners. The removed widow glass replaced with boards. The roof looked to be in poor repair with obvious holes.

James realized he had approached the back of the camp. James pulled back into the forest and circled the camp. Approaching from the other side, James saw barracks and huts for the guards and camp administrators. Another building had a sign announcing it as the camp office. These buildings looked in much better repair. In fact, they looked luxurious for a military organization.

Beyond the guard camp, James spotted the gate into the prisoner's area. It was set up with an inner and an outer gate. Machine gun emplacements stood outside the exterior gate on either side. An additional guard tower oversaw the area. James bet that guard would be equipped with heavy weapons also.

James remembered watching a couple old reruns of the comedy, Hogan's Heroes before attending Hogwarts. The camp from the show bore little resemblance to what he now saw. This was not a Prisoner of War camp. These people had no international treaty ensuring a basic care standard. These were German citizens. The infamous ovens and gas showers would not yet in existence. It would be a couple of years before Hitler's "Final Solution" would go into effect.

James felt a wave of disgust pass through him. The similarities between Hitler's views on "the lesser races" and Voldemort's on "mudbloods" were simply too obvious. The odd thing was Grindelwald did not seem to truly share those views. He wanted unrestrained power and access to forbidden magic. The Dark Lord's support of

Hitler's actions were a means to an ends for him, rather than a goal itself. James wondered idly if growing up during WWII made the young Voldemort identify with Hitler's goals. Which would have been odd considering Hitler was pure Muggle.

Unseen by the large number of guards, the wolf crept into their camp. The barracks stood up off the ground, allowing the wolf a crawlspace. The shadow moved stealthily through the camp listening to the conversations of the guards. James estimated the time to be near 3am. Although most of the guards seemed to be in bed, James was surprised at the level of activity that continued through the night.

On the east end of camp, next to the office building and the camp gate, James received his first nasty surprise. A small hut sat by itself with no obvious purpose. James approached it for cover and felt himself pass through some Muggle-repulsion and Notice-Me-Not charms. The charms were not long-term wards, but rather temporary spells. Standing next to the hut, James's wolf hearing could hear the sounds of a brutal interrogation occurring inside.

A woman's voice screamed out in pain accompanied by the brutal laughing of at least three men. James recognized the woman's voice as Charlie. James felt his inner-Gryffindor demanding he act to rescue his fellow team member. He ruthlessly suppressed that impulse. Any premature action now would also risk the primary mission of rescuing the Auror team. James did not like to leave a team member as a captive but forced himself to remain still.

Once his impulse was set aside, James moved carefully around the hut. He smelled at least four men inside the hut with Charlie. Could the fourth man be another Dark Army wizard or could it be Alex?

Based on the size of the hut and the number of wizards inside the hut, James guessed the interior of the hut was magically expanded to a much larger size. This made it difficult for James to get an idea of what the team would expect on entering the hut. Although only four wizards were here now, a Floo connection could mean that a large number of wizards could appear at anytime.

James moved quietly out of the camp. He thought of using his bushy tail to wipe away as many of his paw prints as possible. Unfortunately,

the wet ground prevented that from being an easy task. He also figured it would appear suspicious if wolf tracks were found and some of them were wiped away. James made sure to leave a number of tracks near the rubbish pile. Hopefully the tracks would be attributed to a scavenger and forgotten.

The wolf moved back into the forest without any alarm being raised. Once away from the camp, James moved away from the camp until he reached a stream. He crossed into the stream and followed it down a bit. James hoped that if the guards attempted to track the wolf, the stream would end their hunt.

James changed back into his human form standing in the stream. The sudden loss of the wolf's senses came as a shock. Once he became an Animagus, James realized that some of the wolf's attributes seemed to remain with him. The wolf's sense of smell coupled with its strength and stamina remained after he changed back, albeit in a greatly reduced level.

The problem with the wolf is it would not allow him to explore the prisoners' camp. The barbed wire would be bad enough, but the dogs would react immediately when they caught his scent. No, the wolf would not do for this at all.

When Harry worked on his Animagus training, Professor McGonagall used a combination of a potion and self-hypnotism to help the three identify their animals. Ron simply fell asleep and saw nothing. Hermione saw her cat form. Harry was the surprise. When he emerged from his session, he told them he saw two forms. The professor encouraged him to choose one form. Hermione backed her up, telling Harry that dual forms were impossible.

Harry believed Hermione and the professor. However, Hermione's know-it-all attitude struck a sore spot. Harry worked on his second form at night after Ron and Hermione was asleep. Everyone knew that Harry had trouble sleeping so neither Hermione or McGonagall questioned it. Ron knew, but he covered for Harry. After Harry demonstrated his first form, Ron and Harry enjoyed the looks on the ladies' faces when he changed into his second form.

Remus thought it was wonderful when he learned of Harry's ability. It was then he gave Harry his Marauder name, The Count. Moony laughed himself breathless when Harry started doing impressions of Snape with a cape.

Ron's cheeky comment was, "This explains how a bloke with poor eyesight can beat everyone else to the Snitch!"

In a flicker, the medium sized, black haired wizard was gone. In a squeak and flutter, the black form of a bat flew off into the night.

The bat fluttered through the canopy of trees. James's natural radar allowed him to avoid the various branches. Flying as a bat was almost as much fun as broom flying. The form was much slower but it was so maneuverable. James's only problem with it was the diet. His form could not resist snacking on the various flying insects that crossed his path. The proteins were great especially after the meager offerings at the farm; however, the idea turned his stomach whenever he reverted to human form.

James the bat flew over the fence unnoticed. His natural radar provided him with an accurate mental image of the camp. He avoided the search beams sweeping the camp as he moved towards the prisoners' barracks.

James flew to a roof overhang and landed hanging upside down. (This was actually the hardest of the bat's behavior to get used to for James.) Once he had tucked in, James started listening to the conversations around him. Most of the prisoners around him slept huddled against the chilly night air. The guards spoke in muffled tones as they walked their posts.

No hint was sounded from inside to former munitions factory. James started flying from building to building around the camp. For two hours, James searched the camp for any sign of the Auror team with no luck. James did not even feel a hint of magic within the camp.

James started to get nervous. Could the DoM's intelligence be faulty? It was possible that the team was housed in another location. James did not want to think about the possibility they were already dead.

Mad-Eye survived this war in Harry's time. Could James's arrival have altered history aside from Tommy?

Realizing nothing more would come from flying about the camp, James flew in a hole in the roof of the former munitions factory. James fluttered into a secluded corner and resumed his human form. Being able to fly was great, but James realized that the prisoners would see a "flying mouse" as a potential meal. The irony of defeating Voldemort only to die as a prisoner's dinner would not be funny.

James pulled on his invisibility cloak and cast a silencing charm on his feet. Passing down the hallways, James truly realized the misery the Nazi government forced these men to live in. They lived in conditions that made the Dursley's cupboard seem a five-star hotel. The stench and despair of this place made James sick.

Working methodically from the top floor to the basement, James searched every corner of the prisoner barracks. Guards patrolled at odd intervals but they noticed nothing. None of them seemed magical or escorted dogs. (James bet the dogs refused to set foot in here. Even his reduced wolf sense of smell was whining like a Malfoy.) James simply stepped aside to allow them to pass.

Finally, James found his objective in the basement. Locked behind a thick steel door were eleven of the twelve Aurors. All of them but two slept. From the stance of the two awake Aurors, they were standing a rotating guard.

Without dropping the cloak, James whispered, "Hello, mates. Enjoying your vacation?"

The two awake Aurors jerked up in surprise at whispered comment in English. One of them edged near the door, "Who are you?"

A dozen cheeky answers sprang to James's lips. He settled on an honest answer, "Ministry team sent to look in on you blokes. Why aren't there twelve of you?"

"The damn Gerries killed Hollings. Spell damage joined two of his fingers together. Said he was an obvious defect so they killed him with a Muggle gun," the Auror answered angrily. "Can you let us out?"

“Not yet. The rest of the team is not in place. If I let you out now, you would all fight valiantly and die that way,” James replied.

Now the second Auror joined in. “Better that than to simply rot here! Better a clean death than this!”

In a dry tone, James observed, “Ah, the Gryffindor in the bunch.” Seeing the Auror starting to get worked up, James added, “I believe the Ministry would prefer you alive and back in England.”

The first Auror smiled slightly at James’s comment. “My friend is not taking offence at having Gryffindor’s honor tarnished. He was in Slytherin.”

James snorted and replied, “That’s okay. The hat wanted to put me in Slytherin but I talked it into putting me in Gryffindor.”

Now both Aurors snorted quietly.

The second one asked, “How will we know when you return?”

“The password is “Phoenix”. Take these.” James passed a small bundle through the door bars.

“What are these?”

“Generic wands. Won’t work as well as you own, but they should get the job done. Hide them until the time comes. For Merlin’s sake, don’t use them until then. If a Dark Army wizard catches a whiff of magic we are all in a lot of trouble.”

The Aurors both nodded their agreement. One answered, “We won’t let the others know about them. That should cut down on the temptation.”

James gave an approving nod and said his goodbyes. He slipped quietly back upstairs to a good exit point. James did not honestly think the Dark Army would pick up the magic from the Aurors’ generic wands. Nothing happened from his own use of a Silencing charm. However, the risk was too great if they attempted to stage a breakout

of their own. Sure, they could get out of the camp, but where would they go from there?

James exited the same way he entered, as a bat. A quick flight and James was amongst the trees. James flew towards the farm in exhaustion. It was now almost 5:30. The farmers would be waking up soon. James had worked all day on the farm and only napped before leaving on his mission. James needed to get back to Munich and make contact with Bill and Don. They needed the information from James to plan their rescue of the remaining Aurors and Charlie.

The trip back to the farm was anticlimactic. The bat made good time on its flight through the forest. James just had time to return to the barn and change back into his Goyle disguise. A Pepper-up potion helped take care of the lack of sleep. Then it was time to start the day's labors on the farm.

After dinner, James collapsed in a hay bale and fell immediately asleep. The potion almost lasted until the end of the working day. The last hour had been brutal. James planned to make the trip to Munich after the rest of the workers fell asleep again. In the mean time, a good six hours of sleep would work its own magic.

James stepped quietly into the small inn and passed the innkeeper unseen. Bill and Don entered the inn a earlier in the evening after a night in the beer hall appearing to drink. Tonight was the second night since James's reconnaissance of the prison camp. Last night was spent on a fruitless search of the town for the two Unspeakables.

James stepped up to their room door and knocked softly. Don answered the door with a sleepy but friendly expression on his face. His expression did not change on recognizing James except his eyes looked slightly relieved.

"Hans! You made it!" Don wrapped James in a hug and pulled him into the room. "We thought we missed you!" The last comment was made as the door shut behind them.

The closing door revealed Bill behind the door with a drawn wand. Bill quickly cast a modified silencing charm. "Anyone listening will only

think they hear a casual conversation. Kind of a aural notice-me-not charm.”

James noticed Bill’s wand was still pointed at him. A glance out of his eye told him Don’s was out also. James carefully moved his hands out to show they were clear.

“Where is the rest of the team?” Bill growled.

“I believe Alex and Charlie were picked up crossing the border. Grindelwald’s men followed them here and attacked them in their hotel room. Fred went in to check on them and got caught in a trap. I know Fred is dead.”

Bill and Don’s faces went white at this news. “Why weren’t you caught in the trap?” Don asked in a low, dangerous voice.

“Fred told me to stay in the room and keep an eye out. The first sign of trouble was the spell lights in the window. Most of them were Killing Curse green.”

The two Unspeakables looked crushed. James could sympathize. A good team became family in the most important sense of the word. This team was definitely one of the best. James knew exactly what they were feeling right now.

“I think Charlie is still alive. At least as of two nights ago.”

At the look of hope in their eyes, James explained to the two men about his investigation of the concentration camp. He quickly explained the camp layout, the unusual hut, and where the Aurors were kept.

“I did provide them with the wands we brought along. They could escape on their own now but need a way to get out of the area. The wards extend of about 500 meters around the camp. I don’t think most of them could run that far.”

Bill rubbed his jaw as he considered. “Don can make a Portkey to a safe house outside Paris. How strong are the wards?”

“Strong enough,” James answered. “They haven’t been there more than five years, but someone poured a lot of power into them. Crashing them would take time and be very obvious.”

The next two hours were spent discussing various ideas and approaches to the problem. All three men were starting to get tired and frustrated.

Rubbing his eyes, James asked, “Don, could you get into the cell where the Aurors are being held undetected?”

Don nodded, “That shouldn’t be a problem. It might take me a spot of time. But I can’t get them out with me.”

Bill asked, “What about if we stun them and place a shrinking spell on them? You could carry them out the same way you came in.”

Don nodded slowly, considering the idea. “That could work. They would be useless in a fight until I could get to a safe place to reverse the spells though.”

James shook his head. “Once you are out of the camp, I want you to keep going until you can activate the Portkey. Wake them up in Paris.”

Bill did not comment but looked at James with an odd expression on his face. Then he asked, “What are we going to do then?”

James carefully kept his face expressionless. “You and I are going to get Charlie back if she is still alive. Her body if she isn’t. I’d like to get Alex and Fred if possible also.”

“The Ministry would not approve that mission change. We are not allowed to do that,” Bill insisted.

“Whoops. I guess I missed that memo. You can go with Don.”

Bill smiled now like a predator. “I misjudged you. I thought you were a pretty boy. Your eyes changed there. The bureaucrats can whine about it later. We are getting our people out.”

Herr Adler's truck pulled into the farmyard early the next morning. Three more workers huddled miserably in the back. Two wore the Star of David emblem and the third wore a pink square. The workers were pulled out of the truck and subjected to the same welcome as "Goyle's" group. Then they were sent off to different menial tasks.

James was stolidly working in a distant field removing rocks when the truck arrived. He noticed Bill wearing a Star being assigned to work another part of the field on the same task. Neither wizard acknowledged the other. They simply acted their roles and worked the field.

At the lunch break, an army staff car pulled into the yard. Three enlisted soldiers and an SS officer got out of the car. Herr Yoder welcomed the officer. James was near by when they arrived. He noticed Herr Yoder acted much like Umbridge when talking to the officer.

"Obersturmbannführer Eichhoff, it is a pleasure to have you visit us again! What may I do for you today?"

The officer continued to survey with a look of disgust on his face. Without looking at the cringing farmer in front of him, he said, "We have moved to a higher state of alert. Foreign enemies of the Fatherland were captured in Munich. The commandant assigned me the task of ensuring the camp's security."

Yoder affected a concerned expression. "The Fatherland's enemies would surely fear to come near this place! They would have to be insane to come here."

Now the Obersturmbannführer looked at the man, "If they were sane they would join our Cause, rather than resist our destiny."

James noted with a shiver that the officer's eyes had the same glint of fanaticism that Lucius Malfoy's acquired talking about the Pureblood's cause.

The soldiers used the time of the conversation to search the barn, the shack, and the surrounding forest. They efficiently covered a lot of

ground and expertly examined everything. If something illegal was hidden on the farm, their search would have found it.

It slightly pained James to realize these were in fact good soldiers serving their country. None of them had the fanaticism their officer displayed. They wore serious expressions as they completed their task but no sense of maliciousness or cruelty came from them. James knew that would change for these young men in the time ahead. Eventually the camp guards would form the basis of the SS's feared and elite military units, the Waffen SS.

The Obersturmbannführer told Yoder to gather all of the workers together for an inspection. James gazed vacantly at the officer as he stood with the others for the inspection. (Actually, James thought he still showed more intelligence than the real Goyle!) Bill and Don lined up together but away from James. The Jewish man who arrived with James stood next to them. The clubfooted man stood between them and James. The newcomer with a pink square stood next to James.

The officer paced up and down the line of workers. He skipped the homosexual and stared at James's vacant expression. He proceeded to glare at all of the workers as if he could decide from that who might be an "enemy of the Fatherland". Finally, he turned from them with disgust on his face and marched back to his car. The soldiers followed him and in moments, the car drove off without another word being said.

Night fell on the farm as the workers bedded down in the barn. James drew his wand and cast a sleeping charm on all of the Muggles. The three Unspeakables quietly started to walk through the forest towards the camp.

Just inside the forest, James turned to Bill and whispered, "Let me go ahead to look for any guards." At Bill's nod, James moved ahead at a quicker pace.

Once out of sight, James changed into his wolf form. James did not want the Unspeakables to know about his Animagus abilities. James had decided to keep as many of his skills and knowledge secret. The fact his power roughly equaled Dumbledore would not be revealed to anyone.

Like the previous trip, no hint of guards were found prior to reaching the boundary of the wards. As he neared the camp he crossed the scent paths of several patrols. At least two of the patrols had guard dogs with them. James wondered about the change. Did they find the wolf tracks or was it the result of the increased alert the officer mentioned?

James hid behind a bush and waited for the other two wizards to catch up with him. James had changed shape occasionally to leave trail markings magically on various trees. The markings were noticeable only via a DoM vision charm, similar to Muggle infrared goggles of a later time.

After waiting for fifteen minutes, James heard Bill and Don approaching. He changed back into human form before they appeared. Using only hand signals, James pointed out the former munitions factory to Don. The smaller Unspeakable nodded with a smile.

Don crept towards the edge of the forest. A twenty-five meter area of open ground separated the forest from the first fence. Just before reaching the clearing, Don seemed to disappear.

“Let’s go,” Bill whispered into James’s ear.

James set off behind Bill and decided he wasn’t the only one hiding magical abilities in this group.

Thirty minutes later, James and Bill reached the edge of the guards’ camp. James estimated it was close to 2:00. Not much activity was going on in the camp except for the armed roving patrols. They were two man teams. When James noticed they often looked under the barracks with their Muggle electric torches, he snorted softly. Looks like someone did notice the wolf tracks.

“What has them so jumpy?” Bill whispered.

James just shrugged. “Not important. There are too many patrols to sneak in. Transfigure your robes to look like a uniform. Safer then trying to Disillusion ourselves.”

Two minutes later a pair of Oberscharfuhrers walked boldly into the camp. Their stride indicated a purpose. The patrolling guards never looked twice at the two soldiers. Escaping prisoners would not be walking into the camp and they would not be wearing perfect uniforms.

James and Bill approached the hut. James casually crossed his arms and drew his wand. Voldemort's wand remained hidden up his other sleeve.

Reaching the hut, Bill wordlessly cast a diagnostic charm on the door looking for any magical alarms or traps. The door was locked but a midlevel opening spell was sufficient to deal with it.

Following Bill into the hut, James's intuition was sending furious warning messages. He felt danger. The war with Voldemort and six years at Hogwarts had honed his danger sense to a fine edge. Something was wrong here.

As James suspected, the hut was much larger inside than the exterior would allow. The room they entered matched the simple exterior of the hut. It seemed to be a combination office and conference room. A large wooden table dominated the room. The table was obviously conjured. It was too fancy to be placed in such a simple room. A roll top desk sat in one corner. James could smell multiple wizards and blood in the room. The blood smell was very strong.

Bill moved over to one of the open doors. His hand signal indicated it contained the fireplace for a Floo connection. The next door had a small barred window. Bill peaked in.

Bill threw himself back as a red Stunner flew out of the window. The Unspeakable crashed to the floor and immediately started rolling towards the closest wall. The door opened and James heard the door behind him magically lock. Four Dark Army wizards stepped into the room. Three of the wizards were cloaked. Masking spells hid their faces. The fourth had his hood down and his face revealed. He looked like a recruiting poster for the Nazi party.

The blond haired and blue-eyed wizard sneered at Bill. "You are the best the British can send? The last of your pitiful Unspeakables. Such

a disappointment. You never even noticed our alarm wards as you entered the camp.”

James allowed his “uniform” to change back into his battle robes. “You knew we were coming and you only brought four of you? Now I am insulted.”

The Dark Army wizard fired a Reducto curse that James easily dodged. “What, no banter? No comments that I would rue the day I came here? I am so disappointed. Guess you haven’t seen enough Muggle films.”

“Shut up you fool! You will talk soon enough!”

“That will do!” With the final comment, James shifted into full battle mode. The chatter was not as pointless as it appeared. James wandlessly cast a powerful shield spell around himself. It also allowed Bill sometime to recover from his impact on the floor when he dodged the Stunner.

Bill cast a Cutting curse at his nearest opponent as James banished the table at the Dark wizards. The lead wizard smashed the table with a concussive force that exploded the table into fragments. Many of those fragments hit James’s shield. Many of the splinters were almost a meter long and as sharp as a rapier.

James fired a series of Stunners and Reductos before the table fragments even settled to the ground. The explosion of the table caused a cloud of sawdust to hang in the air. The cloud prevented James and the Dark wizards from clearly seeing one another. James fired blindly into the general area of the Dark wizards.

James moved along the outside wall away from the door. He saw a series of spells impacting in the general area of the door. It was definitely not a safe place to be.

The dust cloud was settling. James could see Bill held up by a cloaked wizard. The wizard held a wand to Bill’s throat. Two other cloaked wizards stood behind him. The original blond wizard was dead on the floor.

“Drop your wand.” The wizard demanded.

“Does that ever really work?” James asked in a curious voice. “I’ve heard it at least six times before. I’ve never listened.”

“You will do as I demand...”

“Or you will kill my friend. I get it. You really are clichéd. Do you Dark wizards get a handbook? I keep asking for the Light wizard guide but they won’t share it with me. Do you know why?”

“Drop your wand now.”

James ignored the demand. “The reason no one will share it with me is I am more Gray.”

With that comment, James produced his second wand. With a hiss of Parceltongue, James sent a pair of serpents shooting across the floor. The snakes attempted to strike at the wizards. Their thick battle robes prevented any direct strikes. However the nature of robes means they are vulnerable by something striking from underneath.

While the two trailing wizards were distracted, James fired an illusionary Fireball at Bill and the wizard holding them. The illusion provided the feeling of burning heat. A borderline Dark spell, it mixed a pain spell into the illusion. The target would feel the fireball hit them and see their skin burn. Once the illusion was dispelled the pain would disappear and no damage would have occurred.

James was surprised when the fireball missed its intended target. The fireball glanced past Bill and the wizard holding him to strike one of the other wizards paying attention to the summoned snake. The wizard howled in agony that was silenced then the snake was able to reach an unprotected place. The wizard dropped to the floor as convulsions set in.

Both snakes were then killed by a Cutting curse cast by the second Dark wizard.

The Dark wizard holding Bill whispered a spell and dropped the Unspeakable to the ground. "That was a nasty one. You belong on our side."

"I serve the Light, never the Dark."

The two Dark wizards launched a volley of hexes and curses at James. Most he dodged but several Cutting curses and Reductos managed glancing blows. One Dark curse caused an acid-like burn on the top of his right hand and singed the sleeve of his battle robe.

James raised both of his wands and issued a blast of pure, raw magical energy. The blast slammed the two wizards against the wall harder than a giant's club. They slumped to the ground into lifeless lumps.

James quickly checked on Bill to find it was too late. Whatever spell the Dark wizard fired into his ear caused him to die instantly. It did not look like an AK. James transfigured the body into a matchbox and placed it into his pocket.

James banished the bodies of his deceased opponents after collecting their wands. A few short minutes later the table was back in place and all signs of the battle were gone. James mumbled a few short words of thanks to Dobby for the cleaning spells.

Looking into the room the Dark wizards had waited in, James found the huddled form of Charlie. She wore the remains of what looked like a hospital gown. Bruises and cuts covered her body. She moaned pitifully when James touched her shoulder. She did not respond at all to James's questions.

The sight broke James heart. In her place, he saw Luna as he, Neville, and Ron found her after storming Malfoy Manor. Neville almost used the Killing curse on Narcissa Malfoy on the spot. James cast a Sleeping spell on her and transfigured her into a small doll. It would be best if she were unaware until they reached safety.

James slipped out of the hut and into the night air. The Muggle guards were unaware of the battle recently fought in their midst. James walked calmly through the camp until he reached an outlying

building. Then he changed into his wolf form and made his way outside the Portkey wards.

James quietly entered the house. The DoM kept the team's survivors late into the night. They did not care it had been three weeks since James was last home. They wanted everything explained in detail a dozen times.

The DoM leaders were happy to have the successful rescue of the eleven surviving Aurors. They particularly appreciated the fact none of the Unspeakables were revealed to their ministry counterparts in doing so. Recovering Charlie also made them happy. James suspected she came from a leading pureblood family. She did remind him of some of the Slytherin princesses from his Hogwarts days.

The loss of Alex, Bill and Fred bothered the ministry officials. It was the largest team loss in recent history. Not since the Goblin Rebellion of 1546 had been matched. By the time Don and James were released, James was getting ready to hex them all.

Snuffles lay curled around Tommy as James stepped in the door. The now huge dog looked up at James with an odd expression on his face. It seemed to say, 'About time.'

Tommy stirred at dog's movement and sat up rubbing his eyes. "Uncle Jimmy?"

"Tommy, what are you doing sleeping here?" James whispered.

"I knew you were coming home tonight. I had bad dreams all week. I was scared for you."

James hugged the boy and said, "Everything is okay now. Why don't you get into your bed and we'll talk in the morning?"

"Okay. I am really glad your home. We missed you."

"I missed you too."

James watched Tommy and Snuffles wander off to bed. Could Tommy have felt James's experiences in Germany? At one point

Harry might have called giving Voldemort nightmares poetic justice, but James did not want to be doing the same to Tommy.

A soft voice interrupted James's thoughts. "We really did miss you."

James turned to see his wife smiling in the door. He stepped into her arms with a kiss and then simply held her. "I missed you more than I can say. I missed my family."

Sarah chuckled, "It is so nice to have you home. Tommy's dreams scared me. I told him you would be safe and come home."

James nuzzled her neck lightly, "I have every reason in the world to come home safely to you."

Sarah took James's hand and guided it onto her abdomen. She whispered into his ear, "Let me give you one more."

A/N: German Ranks used in this chapter:

Commandant – commander of a base or installation

Obersturmbannfuhrer – SS Lieutenant Colonel

Oberscharfuhrers – SS staff sergeant

Rottenfuhrer – SS corporal

A/N: Congratulations to Sweet-Single for the first successful guess on why Tommy was happy. Congratulations to Qualerie for correctly commenting that Dracula had two animal forms, the bat and the wolf.

Chapter 9 – Histories Revealed

January 1, 1938

James sat eating a breakfast at the kitchen table. The house was quiet. Silence rarely occurred anymore in the Evans house. James enjoyed his tea while reading the Daily Prophet. The silence did not last long.

The sound of a crying baby circulated throughout the house.

‘That kid could out-wail a banshee,’ James thought. James set the paper aside and left the table. He hoped to reach the source of the noise before Sarah woke up.

Another new addition to the Evans house popped into view at James’s side. “Master James, the little mistress is awake.”

“Yes, Cillie, I heard her. Could you please get breakfast ready while I pick up her highness?”

The house-elf giggled, “Yes, Master James.”

James walked down the hall to the sound of the infant in distress. The addition of Cillie came at the recommendation of Elizabeth Potter. With James disappearing occasionally for the DoM and Sarah’s Healer duties, the hiring of the elf was a huge blessing for the parents.

Elizabeth Potter asked the Potter elves to locate an unemployed elf. Cillie was the niece of the head Potter elf. James offered her freedom and wages. The poor elf almost died of fright on the spot. After calming the scared elf, James told her he would provide a savings for her and promised her freedom whenever she wished for it. Sarah provided her cloth to make clothes. Callie made several outfits similar to a Muggle butler. James did not have the heart to tell her that they were usually men’s clothes.

James reached the sound of the news and picked up the crying infant. “Katie, shhh. Don’t wake your brothers.”

“Too late,” a voice came from the hall.

James turned to see the now eleven year-old Tommy (Call me Tom!) Riddle rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "Little miss has a voice like an air raid siren."

James snickered. Then he said, "Check on her partner in crime."

Tom walked over to the other crib in the room and glanced down. "Still asleep. He can sleep through anything."

"Natural defense from sleeping in the same room as Katie."

James finished changing his 10-month-old daughter. Katie Elizabeth Evans was born on February 20, 1937. She preceded her brother, Michael Thomas Evans, by five minutes. Katie had her mother's blond hair and James's green eyes. Michael looked like a mix of his parents with James's black, unruly hair. His eyes were odd. One was James's green and the other Sarah's blue.

Katie's personality demanded attention. She loved to have a fuss made over her. Michael seemed content to entertain himself. Katie did not like to allow Michael out of her sight. The little girl seemed to dominate her twin brother. Michael just smiled and gurgled at his sister.

James could feel a slight pulse of happiness come from Tom. Tommy disappeared on the day he found out his siblings were on the way. James felt the boy's happiness all the way in Germany. Tommy felt that if he was going to be a big brother, he should be called Tom instead of Tommy. James and Sarah also moved from being Uncle and Aunt to Dad and Mum.

The pure happiness and excitement of the then 9-year-old seemed to reconnect the link between Tom and James. James suspected the extremely strong emotion forced the link back into existence. It did not seem nearly as strong as previously, but when he was close or the feeling was very strong James picked up a sense of what Tom felt.

Picking up his daughter, James said, "Cillie is making breakfast. Lets go eat."

Tom grinned at his adopted father, "It would be silly to miss it."

James groaned as they walked out of the room. "Why did I teach you about puns? I should have known better!"

"Maybe you left your common sense in the '90's?" Tom cheekily asked in a mock-concerned voice.

James smiled back at his oldest son, "Brat."

As they called into the kitchen, Cillie called out, "Happy Birthday, Little master!"

As Tom thanked the elf, James asked, "Is it someone's birthday?"

"Dad! You know it is my birthday!"

"Really. Maybe that is why that owl kept flying around the house last night. I finally got it to go away." James thanked his Occlumency training for his ability to say this with a completely straight and serious face.

Tom's face went white and panic set in. "You sent away my Hogwarts owl! Dad, you know that is what it was here for! You have to Floo Professor Dippet and have it sent back!"

James took on a surprised expression. "Did you want to go to Hogwarts? I never knew that."

Tom realized his father was winding him up. "You have the letter! I know it! Where is it?" Tom started looking excitedly around the kitchen. After not seeing the expected envelope with green writing, he started patting the pockets of James's dressing gown.

James chuckled and dodged Tom's attempts to pat him down. Katie giggled as they whirled around the room.

"You three are having fun this morning." Sarah observed from the doorway.

Tom threw his mother the puppy dog eyes. "Mum, Dad won't give me my Hogwarts letter!"

Sarah produced an envelope in her hand. "You mean this letter?"

"Yay!" Tom dashed over to his mother and grabbed the envelope. "Thanks, Mum!" He tore open the letter and read for a moment. "I am going to Hogwarts! Can I go get my wand and things now?"

James stood with his arm around Sarah's shoulders. "Congratulations Tom. We know that you will do fantastic at Hogwarts."

Sarah gave Tom a hug. "We will go to Diagon Alley this weekend. Nothing is open today."

"You've already read most of the Magical Theory books in the library. Even some of the ones I told you NOT to read," James commented from the table with Katie.

Tom flushed a bit at realizing he had been caught in his midnight raids. On the other hand, Dad did not seem upset. "Sorry Dad. I just want to learn everything about magic."

James smiled slightly. In his mind, he saw the image of a bushy brown haired girl nodding excitedly next to Tom. "I understand Tom, but some of those books are too advanced for you now. After you've been at Hogwarts for a while we will start working on some of the advance stuff during the summer, but only if you control your curiosity now. Deal?"

Tom grinned at his father, "Deal!"

January 5, 1938

The eleven year-old Tom Riddle led the way down Diagon Alley. James and Tom had already picked up all of the books required for a First year. All of the potions supplies and other materials had already been purchased. Only one thing remained.

Tom almost dragged James into a small dark shop. Ollivanders. Wand Shop was their final destination. The shop looked as small and shabby as it was when Harry arrived here for his wand. It looked like the same purple pillow with a wand on it sat in the display window.

James stepped in behind Tom. He then turned immediately to face the corner where Ollivander was lurking in the shadows.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Ollivander,” James said.

Stepping into the light, the wand maker said, “Er, Good evening sir. I know everyone I have ever sold I wand to, but I don’t remember you. I feel I should though.”

James ignored the implied question. “My son will be starting at Hogwarts soon. We would like to pick up his first wand.”

The creepy wand-maker tore his eyes away from James and stepped around the counter. “Ah, young sir, what would your name be?”

“Tom Riddle”

“Let’s see what wand chooses you Mister Riddle.” Ollivander pulled out his tape measure and went to work. He used the same tricks he did when Harry Potter arrived here.

Tom picked up his first wand and shook it with no effects. Undeterred, Ollivander pulled one long thin box after another off of his shelves. None of them fit Tom correctly.

After an hour the wand maker stared at Tom with a perplexed look on his face. Quietly to himself he mumbled, “I wonder...” Without another word, he stepped into the back.

In a moment he returned with a wand on a pad. “I recently finished this wand. I am still working on its brother. I am curious though.” He handed the wand to Tom.

Tom moved the wand slightly. Instantly sparks started to shoot out of the tip. Ollivander clapped delightedly.

“The core of this wand came from a phoenix I recently made the acquaintance of. He gave me two feathers only. I never expected to sell one so quick. I wonder if the other one will go as fast?” Shaking off his own comments, the wand maker said, “This wand will be

excellent for charms and very good for dueling. At 13 ½ inches, it is a little long to be a perfect dueling wand.”

James smirked as he thanked the wand maker and paid his five Galleons.

James chuckled to himself as he followed Tom out of the shop. Tom was oblivious as he admired his new wand while they walked. James recognized the 13 ½ inch yew wand. Its exact duplicate sat hidden in his locked trunk in his home. It was the same wand Harry took from the fallen Voldemort.

June 15, 1938

Sarah had taken Katie and Michael to visit Sarah’s mother for the day. The old battle-axe still refused to accept James the Half-Blood as her son-in-law. Sarah hoped the presence of magical grandchildren would ease her mother’s resistance. James wasn’t willing to make book on the odds.

James and Tom were left alone in their house. Tom split his summer between his schoolbooks, his friends from the village and playing Quidditch. James almost choked himself on pumpkin juice when he found Tom reading *Hogwarts: A History* aloud to his younger brother and sister the previous week.

James called Tom into his study and sat him by the empty fireplace. Tom had a concerned look on his face. James did not usually look this serious unless he was leaving on one of his business trips.

“Tom, you are getting ready to go to Hogwarts. I wanted to talk to you a bit about the past,” James started. Tom paled a bit to here that opening.

“Tom, relax. This is not really about that other person in my past. I need to tell you a bit about where you came from. Sarah and I consider you our son just as much as Michael is. I think you will need to know at least some of this before leaving for school.”

Tom nodded, “Okay,” in a small voice.

“Your father comes from an upper class family; not nobility but moneyed. They owned most of the land in and around the village of Little Hangleton. Obviously, their names were the Riddles. Your fathers name is Tom also. They viewed people with less money or different then them as being their inferior.

Your mother’s name was Merope Gaunt. She lived with her father Marvolo and brother Morfin in an small, old house outside of the village. They were descended from a very old Pureblood family. They took great pride in that fact. They were very similar to the Riddles in their pride, but they valued very different things.

Your grandfather and uncle did not treat your mother well. Feeling trapped, she developed a crush on your father. In her imagination, he loved her back. One day a man from the Ministry of Magic came because Marvolo and Morfin broke the law. They were sent to Azkaban.

Merope used the chance to escape. I believe she used a love potion on your father. They ran away to London together. After she became pregnant with you, I believe she thought your father would truly love her now. He was very upset when the potion wore off and left her alone in London. This broke her heart. She held on until you were born, but used the last of her strength to give you life.”

Tom listened to the story with a pale face. Tears started when James talked about his mother. “Why didn’t she stay with me?”

James held Tom close to his chest. “She didn’t have a choice, Tommy. She was never very health. While she was pregnant, she never could afford much food or medicine. She sold some things she stole from your grandfather, but people took advantage of her ignorance. Merope fought to make sure you survived. She gave you everything she had.”

Tom rubbed his eyes. “Like your mum?”

James nodded, “In a different way, yes.” (1)

“Are the others still alive?”

“Your father and his parents are still alive. Your mother’s father died not long after you were born. Your uncle still lives in the same house.”

Softly Tom asked, “Can I meet them?”

A slight fear clutched at James’s heart. “If you wish.” Tom nodded.

“I see you have been reading *Hogwarts: A History*. What did you think of the Founders?”

“They seemed interesting. It was sad that Gryffindor and Slytherin stopped being friends. It didn’t make sense though.”

James asked, “What didn’t make sense?”

“Wouldn’t they have talked about who to teach before they built the school? Why didn’t it come up before they opened the school? I think a piece is missing.”

“I have heard that question before,” James answered. “There is a Muggle saying, ‘History is written by the victors’. Do you understand what this means?”

Tom nodded. “So the other side of the story may be missing.”

James nodded, “The important thing we need to talk about is Salazar Slytherin.”

“Why?”

James sighed. He feared this conversation for the last couple of years. James knew in his past Voldemort learned of his relationship with Slytherin his first day at Hogwarts. Tom needed to be prepared for that knowledge, but James feared it would lead him down the wrong path. However, he feared Tom’s reaction if James hid it and Tom learned of it on his own. Shades of Harry’s Fifth years and those revelations still haunted James.

“The Gaunt family is descended from Salazar Slytherin. That is why you are a parsel tongue. All of the Gaunts had that ability.”

Tom looked stunned. "I am descended from Slytherin?"

James nodded. "Actually, I think it is kind of cool. Did you know that the Potters have a magical painting of Slytherin and Gryffindor together? They talked to me once."

Now Tom looked excited. "Really, could I talk to them?"

"Maybe. Do you still want to go meet your living relatives?"

Tom nodded, the excitement leaving his eyes.

James placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Tom, remember you are my son now. Nothing will change that. I hope you can establish something with the Riddles, but Sarah your brother and sister and I will always be here for you."

Tom smiled though his face revealed his nervousness. "Can we go today, Dad? I don't want to sit around and think too much about this."

"Why don't we wait until after lunch. That gives you some time to think. Then we will Portkey there," James suggested.

Tom grimaced, "It sounded okay until you mentioned the Portkey. Can't we Floo?"

James grinned, "Sorry, there are no other magical families in the area."

Tom just groaned.

A very normal looking pair walked into the village of Little Hangleton. Although they arrived on foot, their expensive looking clothing spoke for them. They walked through the village. The young boy in the pair looked around the village in curiosity. The young man with him pointed out Riddle Manor on the hill overlooking the village. The locals noticed the boy looked much like young Tom Riddle, Mr. Arthur Riddle's son did as a young lad.

James and Tom walked up to the front door of the Riddle Manor. James pulled on the door chime. He smiled comfortingly at Tom while they waited.

After a minute, the doors opened. An older servant stood in the door. "May I help you?"

James smiled, "Good afternoon. My name is James Evans. Would I please be able to speak with Mr. Tom Riddle?"

"Do you have an appointment?" the man asked in a disinterested voice.

"No, I am afraid I don't."

"I am afraid that Mr. Riddle is too busy to meet with anyone today. Please try to make an appointment for another time." The servant made to close the door.

James pulled Tom up beside him. "Tell Mr. Riddle this deals with his biological son."

The old man glanced at Tom and blanched. "Just one moment, sir." The door shut but they could hear the man's footsteps scurrying away. James and Tom smiled slightly at each other.

Five minutes later, the door opened again. An older gentleman in a suit stood in the door. He scowled at James, "You claim this whelp is my grandson?"

James kept his face neutral. "I claim nothing. This boy is Tom Riddle. He is the child of Tom Riddle and Merope Gaunt."

"Sir," Tom started. The old man turned his glare on Tom.

"Sir, I don't want anything from you. My father provides me anything I need. I just wanted to know where I come from." James was so proud of the maturity of his son's comment.

The old man's face turned violet. "You came from a trick played on my poor son. Those Gaunts are freaks. Get away from here! Never come back!"

The door slammed in their faces.

James led a dejected Tom away from the door. He wondered if there was some chance the Dursleys and Riddles were related.

As they exited the garden, a voice stopped them. "Please wait."

James and Tom turned at the sound. A woman in her late fifties stepped out from behind a bush.

"Is it true you are my Tommy's son? You look so much like him. Please come sit with me. My husband cannot see us from the house here."

Tom and James followed the woman into a gazebo. The woman sat down. James and Tom sat down across from her.

"What is your name, child?"

"Tom Malvolo Riddle, ma'am"

The woman's eyes started to tear. "I am so sorry for what my husband said. It is not your fault. My Tom was a sweet boy growing up. He got into some trouble but he matured out of it. He was to attend Eton but he disappeared one morning.

He left a note saying he had married Merope Gaunt. His fiancée, the daughter of my best friend, suffered a breakdown. We heard no word for over a year. Then he returned with a bizarre story about drugs forcing him to love the girl. No one believed him. His fiancée refused to ever see him again. He has sat in the house haunted by pieces of memories for the last eleven years. In many ways my son never really returned to us."

Tom looked guilty at this story. He glanced at James and stepped over and sat next to the woman. "I am sorry for what happened. My

mother was scared and wanted to get away from her father and uncle. She died when I was born.”

Tom’s grandmother smiled and asked, “This man raised you?”

Tom nodded, “Since I was six. Before that, I lived in an orphanage. Dad saved me from that horrible place. Now I have a father, a mother and a brother and sister.”

“I am glad for you, child. I am sorry for everything, but I can’t change the past. You won’t be able to come here again. My husband and son would not be able to handle it.”

Tom looked devastated at this news. James intervened. “Madam, I have not introduced myself, I am James Evans. I am Tom’s father now. I understand what you are saying. It is not fair to Tom or yourself, but again, I understand.

Before we go, I would like to give you my card. I work with a Foundation that may be able to help your son. Maybe then your husband and son would feel different.”

“Thank you, Mr. Evans. We have tried all types of specialists. I doubt yours could do any better.”

James shrugged, “Perhaps, but could they do any worse?”

Mrs. Riddle considered a moment and nodded. Then she turned to Tom and said, “I am sorry for what I needed to say to you today. You seem a bright boy. You look just like your father at your age. Would you be willing to do one thing for me before you leave?”

Tom glanced at James before nodding.

The woman looked down. “Would you please give your grandmother a hug?”

Tom wrapped his arms around his grandmother. James watched as they both began to cry. After several minutes, Tom’s grandmother pushed Tom away and stood.

“I am sorry. I have to go now. My husband will be missing me.” Without another word, she fled the gazebo.

James wrapped his arm around Tom. “We can just sit here until you feel better.”

Tom nodded and curled into his father’s lap. Neither spoke for a while after that.

James and Tom approached a wretched looking shack outside the village. It sat on a small wooded hill. The scenery was picturesque, except for the shack itself. The shack looked worse then the memory Professor Dumbledore showed Harry in Sixth year. The Shrieking Shack looked more structurally sound and weatherproof then this wreck did.

Standing on the lane in front of the shack, Tom stopped as if reluctant to move closer. He glanced up at his father with an unsure expression on his face.

“I don’t think I want to do this anymore.”

James glanced at the shack and turned to Tom, “I wouldn’t blame you. You don’t need to do this.”

No sooner had the words left James’s mouth the shack door was flung open with a loud crack. Emerging from the house was a dirty, hairy man. The man appeared vaguely simian in his facial features. (What James could see under the dirt and matted hair.)

“Get out of here you stinking Muggles! Damn mudbloods! You are not worthy to be here!”

James turned to face the repulsive man. “Knock it off, Gaunt. We know exactly who and what you are. Are you so sure about us?”

Morfin Gaunt glared at James and Tom. He let out a hiss of parsel tongue. James looked disgusted by the comments the pureblood wizard made. Tom looked confused. He didn’t know what half of those words meant.

In the same language, James hissed back, You sit here wrapped in the glories of your ancestor while you squalor in the mud like a pig. Wouldn't Salazar be proud of his ancestors?

Morfin looked shocked as he heard another speak parsel tongue for the first time since he and his father were sentenced to Azkaban.

Tom enjoyed the look of shock on the horrible man's face. He added, At least take a bath occasionally. You look like your mother mated with a sick ape.

James snorted with laughter at Tom's comment. For a 'puff, Sarah could have a temper. His wife could wield her tongue as a lethal weapon. Apparently her influence was rubbing off on Tom.

James gestured at Tom and said in English, "May I introduce you to your sister's son? This is Tom Malvolo Riddle."

Morfin sneered at Tom, "So you're that worthless squibs whelp. She was never any good. Never did anything right. Glad she is dead."

A cold look came across Tom's face. It was a face James had never seen before, but one Harry knew all too well. It was the same look of pure hate Harry saw whenever he faced an angry Voldemort. For the first time in four years, James felt his scar ache.

Never speak of my mother again. Your family ends here with you. The Gaunts will pass unnoticed and unremembered. I think my mother would have liked that. Turning to James, Tom asked, "Can we go home now, Dad? I don't have any family here."

James smiled proudly as he felt Tom step back from the brink the 16-year-old Tom had crossed. It had been a near thing. If Tom had known the spells, would he have held back or given into his impulse? James felt proud but he worried also. The dark impulses that led to Voldemort still seemed to lurk inside his son. Was his new family enough to help Tom suppress those urges?

James stuck his hand out to his son. "I am proud of you Tom. Let's go home."

As they walked away from the shack and its occupant, Tom asked his father, "Can I stop being Tom Malvolo Riddle?"

"What do you want to be called?"

"Tom Evans. It sounds much better."

James stopped to hug his son. "I think that sounds perfect."

July 31, 1938

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JAMES!"

James jumped with his wand coming instantly to his hand in mid-dive. His in-flight recognition of the source of his surprise kept him from releasing the spells the leapt immediately to his mind.

James received an owl at his office this afternoon asking him to stop at the Potters on his way home from work. At the appointed time, James Apparated to Potter Manor. The welcoming cheer sounded as soon as he appeared.

Coming out of his landing roll, James recognized Sarah and his children in the small crowd. Thomas and Elizabeth Potter, Professors Dippet and Dumbledore, and a number of other people James had met in his personal and professional (Phoenix Foundation) lives since arriving here. (James could not see any of his Unspeakable colleagues but that did not mean they weren't here somewhere.)

James turned a bit red as the assembled crowd laughed at his antics. Few of them realized the possible magical results of startling James. James put his wand away with a sheepish smile.

Elizabeth Potter stepped forward to wrap James in a one-armed hug. She was holding her goddaughter in her other hand. "James Evans, I swear you never age a day! You'll have to tell me your secret. Happy birthday, dear."

James accepted his (unknowing) grandmother's embrace. "Thank you, Elizabeth. Sorry for my entry there. Over-trained, I guess."

“We enjoyed watching you roll around like a Muggle acrobat. Didn’t we dear?” Elizabeth addressed her question to little Katie Evans, who gurgled happily in reply.

James smiled at the sight. Thomas and Elizabeth Potter were in truth Katie and Michael’s great-grandparents. Since James could not come clean about the relationship, Sarah suggested making them also the godparents. It allowed James to ensure his grandparents were active in his children’s lives. James grinned to himself. He didn’t think his grandmother would have given James the choice anyway after the fuss she made over the twins and Tom.

Elizabeth Potter smiled at the young man and stepped away to allow James to greet the rest of the guests. He reminded her so much of her Thomas as his age. The Evans were such a delightful family. It filled a hole in her heart to have them near. She and Thomas had tried for years to have a child. No magic or Muggle methods had worked. If she had a son, she would have wanted him to be just like James. Something about him pulled at her heart. Plus, she adored the three children and Sarah.

Unaware of his grandmother’s thoughts, James turned to greet the rest of his family and friends. James hugged his wife and kids. Then he exchanged greetings with Thomas Potter and Albus Dumbledore. Before they could really do more, a voice interrupted James.

“Do you really need to beat up my Aurors so badly, James?”

James turned to the source of the voice with an innocent smile on his face. “Director Franklin! What a nice surprise. I am sorry; I don’t know what you are referring to.”

The lead Auror for the British Ministry of Magic snorted at the show of innocence. “You filled half the beds in the infirmary after your last demonstration.”

James gave him an innocent smile. “Exactly, Stan! I wasn’t that bad. I didn’t fill the other half.”

Stan Franklin joined Thomas and Albus in laughing at James’s show of innocence. As Director of DMLE, Stan knew about James’s

Unspeakable status. Only the Director knew who the Unspeakables were in case an Unspeakable were arrested in the course of their duties.

“Moody thinks you were targeting him. Yelling ‘CONSTANT VIGILANCE!’ and calling him Mad-Eye. Why do you call him Mad-Eye?” The question contained simple curiosity, nothing more.

James smiled broadly. “I think Alistor will make a great Auror. I just love the way he glares at me whenever I call him that. It reminds me of someone I used to know that did the same thing.”

“The rest of the Aurors are calling him Mad-Eye now. It gets his temper up too easy for them to resist.”

James joined in the laughter but thought, ‘Hopefully he will never receive the magical eye that really gave him the nickname.’

The party settled around the dining room table for the next hour. James enjoyed the gathering of his friends from this time. They did not feel as close as his Harry’s friends had been, but they had also never had to deal with the trials Harry and his school friends did either. Still, the inclusion of his wife and children made this one of the happiest nights of his life.

The party was winding down when James led Tom into the Thomas Potter’s office. The room was unchanged from James’s last visit. James led his son over to the painting of the two male Founders.

Before James could say a word, the portrait of Salazar Slytherin spoke in a hiss, “Greetings my descendant.”

Tom nodded hesitantly towards the painting, “Hello. My father wanted me to come and see you.”

Slytherin sneered at James but his words were to Tom, “This blood-traitor is not your father. He is of his line.” The Founder twitched his head to indicate his companion in the painting. “Your father was a disgusting Muggle. Your mother ruined the purity of my line.”

For the second time in six weeks, James saw the expression of hate on his son's face. "You will not talk about my father that way. He saved me and gave me a family. My birth mother gave me life. You are nothing but ink on canvas with a spot of magic. A memory." Then he turned to leave.

"Wait," the voice of Godric Gryffindor requested. "We are sorry to do that to you. We needed to know."

The 11-year-old turned back. "Know what?"

"If you are the one." Gryffindor pointed at James. "We already knew about him, but we needed to know about you. Harry is born of my line but has the ability to be an excellent member of Slytherin House.

"You, my heir, have all of the traits of our house but also the traits to be a member of Gryffindor House. Together you can answer the prophecy," Salazar finished. "Let me tell you a story."

For the next thirty minutes, Salazar and Godric told the story of the breakup of the Hogwarts Founders. The story told in Hogwarts: A History was true, according to the portraits, but not complete. Some ten years after the founding of the school, Salazar Slytherin was teaching potions and arthimacy. While doing research on a spell to fight dementors, an accident occurred when a young wizard played a prank.

The prank caused a violent explosion when the unstable magical energies ripped through the lab. Although severely injured in the explosion, Slytherin did not seem to carry any lingering effects.

On his release from the Hospital Wing, the young wizard attempted to apologize to the Founder. The professor rejected the apology and accused the young boy of deliberate sabotage. The boy was devastated. The Founders were already revered and the rejection was harsh.

Over the next several months, Slytherin blamed a great deal of occurrences on the young wizard. Since the young wizard was a Muggle-born, Slytherin transferred his suspicion onto all other Muggle-born witches and wizards after the original wizard graduated.

His suspicion grew into madness. For a time the other Founders merely watched in concern as their long time friend spun out of control. They sought a way to reverse the changes caused by the magical accident.

Slytherin's madness started to influence certain members of his House. Some of the more politically ambitious pureblood House members rallied behind Slytherin's cause. They found it much easier to gain power with a scared populace. Also the preference of purebloods in powerful positions created a self sustaining system to keep power concentrated.

The other three Founders moved to confront their friend. They saw his motives and magic turning Dark. The confrontation grew into a fight in the Great Hall during noontime meal. Godric Gryffindor had learned his oldest mate had been attacking Saxon and Celt villages. The ensuing fight almost destroyed the Great Hall. Unable to fight the combined magic of the other three Founders, Slytherin fled together with several of his followers.

For the next five years, the forces of Slytherin attacked a number of Muggle villages. These raids were blamed on various raids from tribes in Scotland and the Norse. They also sought out the Muggle-born witches and wizards in Britain and France. The chaos after the Muggle Norman invasion of Saxon Britain allowed the Council of Magic to hide the wizard war.

Eventually, the Dark Lord Salazar's forces attacked Hogwarts. Salazar fell in the battle but at a huge cost. Helga Hufflepuff along with over a quarter of the Hogwarts students and half the staff died in the battle. Devastated by the battle, the remaining Founders helped rebuild but then left the school forever.

After leaving the school, Slytherin married a young pureblood witch and had a daughter. Years later, she married into the prominent Pureblood, the Gaunts. The family tended to intermarry to keep the Slytherin line 'pure'. Not only did this cause the normal issues with marrying within the family, but it reinforced the madness passed by the spell damage.

“Tom,” Salazar said, “you are a half-blood. You have the strengths of my line. We hope the counterbalance of your Muggle blood will allow you to break the cycle of this curse on our family.”

James spoke up. “The Potters are descended from Godric Gryffindor? I never heard that before.”

“Technically, you are not the senior line. Unlike the Slytherin line, my family spread out over the last thousand or so years,” Godric explained. “However your family line is unusually important. You see after Rowena and I left Hogwarts we moved into village in my native Wales. My wife died in the Final Battle. Rowena’s husband had died several years prior in an accident.

In the pain of our losses, we turned to each other. We found solace and understanding in each other. We took the name Potter and lived out our lives as an unknown married couple. My son did rename the village Godric’s Hollow after my death.”

Now James was stunned. He was descended from two of the Founders? “Why didn’t I ever hear this before?”

“Only the head of the Potter family was ever told. It was never recorded anywhere. Your grandfather knows the truth. I can only guess that the story either died with him or your father,” Godric answered.

Any further discussion was cut short when the doors to the office suddenly flew open wide. Thomas Potter walked into the room with an angry expression on his face. Albus Dumbledore hovered in the hall outside.

“What are you doing in this room? How did you open the door?” He demanded.

James was shocked by the anger in his grandfather’s face. “I apologize if I invaded your privacy. My son and I needed to talk for a moment.”

“How did you get in?” Thomas Potter demanded again.

Confused, James answered, "The door was unlocked. We simply opened the door and walked in."

"Rubbish! That door is always locked!"

Tom tried to head off the argument. "I watched Dad just open the door sir. He didn't use any magic."

"This door is charmed so only a Potter can open it. Even Albus can't open it. I know he has tried before on a bet. So tell me, how did you open it?"

James grimaced. He turned to his son. "Tom, can you please go with Professor Dumbledore back to the party. I think I need to talk with Mr. Potter alone."

Tom nodded and got out of the room with a relieved look on his face. Before Dumbledore could object, Tom shut the door behind him.

James looked at his grandfather. "I will need your Wizard's Oath not to reveal anything here without my permission."

"Is it illegal or unethical?"

"Um, good question. I guess the Ministry would say yes. However, in the greater good I would say no. I am willing to take an Oath to tell you the truth. I won't tell you everything but it will be true." James answered.

Thomas nodded his agreement and waited while James took his Oath. Then Thomas did the same. When he was done he said, "Now talk."

James sat down. "My birth name is Harry James Potter. I am from a time in the future when a massive wizard war will devastate the magical communities of Britain and Europe. Hundreds of magical and Muggle people will die. The Ministry will fall, as will Hogwarts. I came here to stop it."

Thomas went white at James's bald account. "Grindelwald wins?" The older wizard sank into a chair.

"No, this is another Dark Lord. He makes Grindelwald look like a Second year." James answered. "We win, but the cost is too high."

"How far in the future? And why send you?" Thomas asked.

"I can't tell you too much information about the future. I've already changed too much. I never planned on having a family here. It just happened. I was supposed to do my job and then lay low. Not have a family and get involved in current affairs." Then James shrugged, "Why did they send me back? I was the only one left alive to send."

Thomas looked shocked at James. "I have to ask. Are you my son?"

James smiled. "No, I am not. I never met you before I arrived here."

"Katie and Michael are Potters too then! And I am going to be a father!" James laughed as his grandfather danced around the room.

James held his hand up. "Maybe. I have already changed history. I am trying to limit those changes but it may already be out of my power to judge that. Don't think this means you are guaranteed to survive the war.

Magical philosophy was never a study area of mine. Obviously, history has changed or can change. (Merlin, this gives me a headache!) I don't know if this is still the same timeline that changed or now an alternate one. You may not have a son this time around."

"Are you going to return to your previous time?"

James looked sad at the question. "I wanted to. I don't want to leave Sarah and the kids. I am trying to find a way to avoid it."

Thomas sat next to James. "You are a good man, Harry. You make me proud of the Potter name."

A/N 1: James told Tom part of the story of the death of James and Lily in Chapter 6. I know this is a different spin on the events Dumbledore showed Harry in HBP. Factually they are the same, but I have James making it a lot softer. An angry and alone Tom

Riddle at 16 would have viewed this much differently then this 11-year-old Tom.

Next chapter: Tom Evans starts at Hogwarts!

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Chapter 10 – Off to Hogwarts

It was very cold and wet. Surrounded by darkness, the pressure crushed down on his chest. He felt pinned. His arms suck. He was trapped.

“TOM EVANS! Get out of bed! You are going to miss the train!” called Sarah Evans.

Those words pierced Tom’s sleep. Slowly opening his eyes, Tom knew where his dream came from.

“Snuffles! Get off me!”

The large, black dog in question gave his owner a dog grin, his large wet tongue hanging out. After repeated hollering, the dog climbed off the bed and sat by the door.

With a huff, Tom Evans pulled himself out of bed and looked around his room for the last four years. Much of the things that meant the most to him were already locked away in his school trunk. Only his broom sitting on its self remained of his prized possessions.

Snuffles wandered over and placed his large head on Tom’s knee and looked up with sad doggie eyes. Tom reached down to rub his best friend behind the ears. Tom had looked forward to today for the last four years. It was September 1st. Time to go to Hogwarts.

Now that the date had arrived, Tom felt afraid. Since the night St. Mungos release him after Dad rescued him from a beating in a London Alley, Tom never slept anywhere else. Now he was leaving home. Sure, Hogwarts was only a fifteen-minute walk away. What if the kids at Hogwarts were like the kids from the orphanage?

Tom Evans dragged himself out of bed and started to get dressed. Snuffles jumped back onto the bed and curled up in the warm spot left from the boy. As he walked to the loo, Tom frowned at his best friend. “Traitor.” Snuffles just wagged his tail slightly.

After his shower, Tom started to feel excitement for his new school return. He was going to get to use magic! Mum and Dad allowed him

to read a lot about different theories and spells, but now he would get to try them out! The nervous fears of an eleven-year-old leaving home were quickly replaced with the excitement of the new school.

Tom's trunk was packed with all of his books and other equipment. Dad bought him a wand holder that could go on his forearm or belt. Tom's arms were still a bit too short for a 13 ½ inch wand to fit comfortably. A couple of discreet charms were cast on the trunk. Only James, his parents or a Hogwarts teacher could open the trunk. It was also significantly lighter than it appeared.

The events of the early summer still haunted Tom. Meeting his remaining biological family members left Tom feeling a bit lost. Like most orphans, Tom developed elaborate fantasies while in the orphanage to explain why he had no family. Reality turned into a let down.

James understood Tom's feelings. James told Tom about his relatives, the Dursleys, after their return. Hearing about James's life before Hogwarts, Tom's comment was, "And you didn't join the other me why?"

James just laughed and answered, "Sometimes I wondered the same thing."

The conversations with James helped. Tom felt the need to prove to his new parents and the relatives that didn't want him his worth. No one would cast him aside as worthless again. He would make James and Sarah proud of their adopted son.

Tom ran to get breakfast with thoughts of Hogwarts running through his head.

Tom enjoyed his last breakfast with his family before leaving for school. Mum was feeding Katie while Tom held Michael on his lap. Michael kept trying to steal the pancakes from Tom's plate. To his delight, Tom kept preventing his theft. This created a game both boys enjoyed. Michael's little belly laughs filled the kitchen.

James wandered into the room. "Good morning, all! I hear Michael is having a good time."

Tom grinned at his dad. "He seems to want my breakfast."

Sarah handed Katie to James. Then she walked over to Tom and wrapped her arms around him. "I am going to miss having you at home. It will be too quiet here."

"Quiet," James snorted, "with these two still here?"

"Ignore him, Tom," Sarah said. "He knows what I mean."

Tom grinned at his dad with a cheeky look. "He will the next time he wants someone to play a pick-up Quidditch game." Then Tom turned his grin on his mum, "Although Dad did tell me about the tunnel from Hogwarts to the Honeydukes basement."

Tom expected this to lead to a minor explosion. It did.

"JAMES EVANS! WHAT DO YOU MEAN TELLING OUR SON TO BREAK THE RULES!"

Tom snickered at his dad's nervous expression. "Nothing dear. I was just telling him it was there."

"You know he will use it! Only after Second year are students allowed into Hogsmeade!" Then he turned to where Tom was snickering. "I better not catch you sneaking out of school!"

Tom looked at his mum's expression and his face dropped. He dropped his head down and murmured, "Yes, Mum. I won't let you catch me sneaking into Hogsmeade." Then he shuffled out of the room.

James started laughing at the sad expression on his wife's face.

She turned to him and sadly said, "I won't see he for almost four months. I shouldn't have been yelling at him."

James wrapped his arms around her. "Don't worry. He only said he wouldn't let you catch him. Not that he wouldn't come.

"That little brat!"

The sounds of Tom laughing came down the hall as he ran away from his mum. Snuffles joined in, barking behind her.

Tom stumbled into the Leaky Cauldron and crashed over an obstacle laying on the floor. He collapsed in a heap next to his trunk.

Two voices came from the floor in almost perfect synchronization, "I hate the Floo!"

James and Tom glanced at each other and grinned. Pulling themselves up off the floor, they gathered up Tom's things for the last part of their journey to King's Crossing.

Climbing into a cab, Tom returned to a conversation they had continued all week. "I still don't get why I have to travel to London to spend the day on a train to travel to the place I just came from! The station is only a five-minute walk from our house! It doesn't make sense!"

James grinned at his son. He leaned over and quietly said, "We are wizards. Logic doesn't play a part!" James leaned back. In a more normal tone of voice, he added, "Besides, the train ride is part of the experience."

Knowing his father was laughing at him, Tom let the argument lapse for now. Instead, he looked out the window at Muggle London. Although Tom knew from his father that war was approaching, life had not seemed to change in London. People scurried about in their normal business, the events occurring on the continent a world away from their daily lives.

"Why don't the Muggles seem more concerned about what is going on?"

James glanced out the window too. "You have some knowledge they do not. Also, it is not a Muggle thing. It is a human thing, magical or not. Even in the face of absolute knowledge of danger, the majority of people will ignore it and hope it goes away. Prime Minister Chamberlain is still telling them a diplomatic solution will be achieved. He is ignoring everything the MoM has told him about Grindelwald."

Tom snorted, "Sheep"

James disagreed. "They need leaders. They are not sheep, but are more concerned with their immediate lives than what may happen. Not many take the long term view."

Tom shrugged as the cab pulled into the station. Quickly unloading the trunk they made their way down to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$.

"I wish Mum could have come with us."

James wrapped his arm around his son's shoulders. "She did too. Katie and Michael would have been a handful getting them down here. Maybe when we pick you up for Christmas break they will be able to come."

The pair approached the correct pillar for the entrance. James wandlessly cast a Notice-Me-Not charm. James walked through first, followed by Tom. An irate young girl with long dark hair and a compressed, unapproving expression followed Tom through.

"You walk right through the gate without even looking if any of the Muggles were paying attention! You could get yourself in trouble with the Ministry. I understand you are a Muggle-born and a First year but ..."

Tom looked at the girl with an odd expression. "I am not Muggle-born. I live in Hogsmeade."

"Then you should have known better than to risk ..."

Tom again interrupted her. "My father cast a charm so the Muggles wouldn't notice. Obviously, you didn't either." The last was said as though to a young child. The young girl glared at Tom for a moment and then walked off in a huff. Tom looked at his father and said, "She's going to be a nightmare."

James did not answer. He stared after the retreating girl with an odd expression on his face. He recognized the Scottish brogue and expression of disapproval. Minerva McGonagall. The sight of his twelve-year-old Transfiguration professor brought a strongly

suppressed bubble of laughter. The rant had been pure Hermione Granger. No wonder McGonagall had been her favorite teacher.

Tom looked up at the laughter in his father's eyes. Something special had just happened. That conversation seemed to touch Dad. Tom shook his head. This time travel and paradox stuff gave the boy headaches. Tugging at his Dad's sleeve he said, "Come on Dad. We are going to miss the train."

Tom led James to the waiting Hogwarts Express. It looked exactly the way James had described it.

He heard James murmur, "You think it would have changed in fifty years."

Tom snorted to himself. Dad was weirding himself out again. Ever since admitting the truth to Tom about who he is and why he came back to the past, Dad had been very open about a lot of what his previous (future?) life had been like. Tom appreciated his Dad's openness. He understood some things were not shared but Tom was a bright boy and was afraid he had figured out a good bit that went unsaid.

At the foot of the train, Tom turned and embraced his father. "Thanks Dad. Tell Mum and the twins that I will write."

James hugged him back. "Have fun at school. Don't cause Professor Dumbledore too much chaos."

Tom smirked back. "Who would I have learned that from?" he asked in a cheeky tone.

After a few more words, Tom climbed on the train with his trunk behind him. He found an open compartment. He opened the window and waved at his father.

A noise behind him caused Tom to turn from the window. Two boys stood in the doorway.

"Can we sit in here?" the short, blond haired boy asked.

The other boy, a bit taller and heavier with thick black hair simply barged into the cabin and dropped into the seat across from Tom.

Tom introduced himself to the two boys. "I am Tom Evans. I'm a First year."

The dark haired boy snorted. His companion gave Tom a polite half-bow and said, "I am Edward Nott. My grumpy friend here is my cousin, Antonin Dolohov. This is our First year also."

Dolohov snorted, "Don't waste your time on the mudblood."

Tom's blue eyes turned glacial. "Why do you call me that? I assume that means you consider yourself a pureblood and me better."

Dolohov growled back, "I am a pureblood and I know I am better than you! These are no wizarding families named Evans. So you must be a mudblood."

Tom leaned back in his seat. "Clever comeback. Definitely Ravenclaw material. If you will just excuse me, I am going to take a nap. We have a long train ride ahead of us."

The larger boy sneered but Nott gave Tom an odd glance. The new boy's reactions were not what he predicted. Most mudbloods would not yet know what an insult that it was to be called that. That meant he had a wizarding background. An instinct warned Nott his cousin had made a bad mistake.

Tom slept through half the train ride. When an elderly witch came past with the snack cart, Tom woke up. Another boy and a girl had joined Nott and Dolohov. He silently observed the four. Tom learned the boy was named Michael Boot.

From the conversation, Tom gathered he was another of Nott's cousins but not Dolohov's. The thin boy with brown hair and a hooked nose seemed a bit nervous. He kept glancing out of the compartment. Tom was not sure if he was looking to escape or not.

The girl was Penelope Midlands. The most noticeable thing about her to Tom was she was completely nondescript. She was average

height and weight with no significant features. She would easily disappear in any gathering. She sat next to Tom but a good two feet away. She did not speak just sat and listened to the conversation.

Giving up on sleeping, Tom sat up and pulled out his First year charms book. Although he had read the book twice since July, Tom wanted to revise some more. It also kept him from having to talk to the others.

Unfortunately, Nott noticed the movement. "So you decided to wake up."

"Obviously."

The Boot boy gave a nervous laugh. "That doesn't seem very friendly. What are you reading?"

Tom sighed. Other kids made him uncomfortable. Why couldn't they just leave him alone? "It is our Charms text."

Dolohov snorted again. (Tom noticed it the other boy did that a lot.) "Think a bunch of studying will make up for being a mudblood?"

The quiet girl finally spoke. She asked Dolohov, "What House do you think you will be in?"

"Slytherin, of course," the boy replied, "only house worth anything. All of my family is in that house."

Nott chimed in, "Father told me I would be in Slytherin. He works for the Ministry in the Department of International Cooperation and he told me it is the only House to be in if you want to reach a major position."

When she glanced at Boot, he laughed slightly. "I don't know. I'll be happy with any of them." Turning to his cousin, he said, "Umm, I'll see you after we get to Hogwarts." Then he left.

Dolohov grunted towards Tom, "I guess you'll be a 'puff?"

Tom ignored his comment. This seemed to anger the boy. The larger boy reached over and pushed Tom's shoulder, "I am talking to you."

Tom continued to ignore him. Penelope and Nott seemed to step back a bit. Dolohov leaned forward and attempted to smack Tom in the head. He missed as Tom pulled his head back without really seeming to notice.

Without looking up from his book, Tom commented, "Please don't do that again."

His anger up, Dolohov moved to leap across the space and beat the boy in front of him. He was stopped by a thin piece of wood pointed at his throat. Tom did not seem to look up at the bully in front of him. In a cold voice he said, "Sit down."

Dolohov sat back and joined the other two in the cabin at staring at Tom. Tom's wand seemed to disappear and he continued reading.

Tom was not really seeing the words anymore. He was thinking about what could have been. Did his alternate self sit in this same cabin and face these three? Tom guessed he would be in Gryffindor or Slytherin. Dad said he was almost Sorted into Slytherin and Salazar from the painting didn't seem too bad a man no matter what happened to him later. Tom wasn't sure he could be Housemates with Dolohov. He played the village idiot and bully well.

No one attempted to speak with Tom the rest of the ride to Hogwarts. Tom used the remaining trip to observe the other students. He was not too impressed. Tom remembered Dad's comments about the Hogwarts Express experience. Tom looked forward to the start of classes. School had to be better than this!

The Express arrived in Hogsmeade exactly on time. Tom stepped off the train in his new school robes. Glancing around, the familiar village felt odd to Tom. He and Snuffles had walked through the station many times but this was his first time ever arriving here.

A man's voice called out for all of the First year students to gather around. Tom walked over to where the middle-aged wizard was

gathering the other First years. The large man wore plain brown robes with patches on the elbows.

“Is everyone here? Great! I am Mister Ogg. I am the groundskeeper and Keeper of the Hogwarts Keys. If you will follow me, I will lead you to the boats for your first view of Hogwarts!”

An excited murmur ran through the crowd of small witches and wizards. Tom followed the crowd from the rear of the group. They reached the small boats by tied to a small dock. Mr. Ogg called out for no more than four students in a boat. Tom noticed Nott, Dolohov, Midlands and another boy climb into the very first boat. Tom climbed into the next to last boat with Michael Boot and two witches.

The first half of the journey across the lake was uneventful. Boot chatted with the two witches. He seemed to know one and was introduced to another.

The nervous boy glanced at Tom and said, “This is Tom Evans. He doesn’t talk much.” Boot indicated a small strawberry blonde girl. “Tom, this is Amelia Bones. Our mothers are cousins. This is her friend Alicia Tidweiter.”

Tom nodded politely and said, “It is nice to meet you.”

Any replies the witches may have made were cut off when Hogwarts came into view. The castle was lit with brilliant colors on a cliff overlooking the lake. The castle’s reflection in the calm waters of the lake seemed almost solid.

Tom sat mesmerized. Living in the shadow of Hogwarts for the last four years, he had never seen the school look like this. Tom decided he owed his parents an apology for making him take the train. He swore to himself he would never forget this first site of the magical school.

The boats entered a small cave at the base of the cliff. The magical boats were guided along side the docks by an unseen force. They touched the dock with barely a bump and allowed the students to get out. Mr. Ogg led the students up a staircase and into the castle proper.

A wizard waited at the top of the stairs for the First year students. Tom recognized the wizard but again felt he was seeing him for the first time. The tall wizard had long brown hair and a long beard of the same color. His pale blue robes had stars and other shapes on them.

“Good evening students, I am Professor Dumbledore. Welcome to Hogwarts. I know you will enjoy your magical time here.” Tom noticed a slight twinkle in the professor’s eyes. “I teach Transfiguration and am the Deputy Headmaster. In a short time, I will be leading you into the Great Hall where your fellow students in the older years await. After your Sorting, you will join your new House tables.

Your House will be your family while at Hogwarts. Your triumphs will be celebrated together. You will support each other through your trials. Success will be rewarded with House points. Rule breaking will be punished with the loss of points and detentions. Your House prefects will explain the House Cup.”

The professor smiled at the students. “You are starting a great adventure. I encourage you all to make the most of it.”

At an unseen signal, the professor turned and led the way into the Great Hall. Although Dad took Tom flying around the school often, this was Tom’s first time inside the Great Hall. The ceiling matched the clear, starry sky outside. Numerous torches and chandeliers lit with magical flames gave the Hall a cheery light.

Tom noticed a stool with an odd crumpled hat sitting on it. Professor Dumbledore walked over to the hat and turned to face the waiting First year students.

“I will call each of you, one at a time. I will place the Sorting Hat on your head. It will determine your House. Now we will begin.”

Tom grinned to himself. Dad told him they had to fight a troll! Tom didn’t really believe him because of the mirth in his eyes, but a part of Tom still worried about it. Tom smiled slightly. He would write Mum to tell her about Dad’s prank, and play up how nervous he had been. No more revenge would be needed.

The professor consulted his list and called out, "Alberts, Jonathon!" who became a Hufflepuff! He was followed by "Bones, Amelia" Gryffindor!, "Boot, Michael" Ravenclaw!, "Brown, Michael" Gryffindor! Antonin Dolohov became the first Slytherin. Then Sylvia Egleton became a Hufflepuff.

Then Tom heard his name called, "Evans, Tom!"

Tom approached the professor and the Sorting Hat nervously. Professor Dumbledore smiled at Tom in a supporting fashion. Tom sat on the stool. The Hat descended over his eyes and cut out all view of the Great Hall.

"My, I haven't seen a mind like this in a long time..." a voice sounded in Tom's head.

"Hello?" the boy asked.

"Hello, Mr. Evans. It has been a long time since I have had a Heir of Slytherin under me. The Gaunt family has not sent a pupil here in several hundred years. Ah, I feel anger in you at being called a Gaunt. Interesting.

Let us see what kind of mind you have here. I see a great deal of intelligence. You love the study of magic. But I don't see you studying simply for the sake of knowledge. You have courage in abundance as well. You would do well in Gryffindor."

Tom started to get nervous when he heard the students starting to murmur amongst themselves. This was taking a lot longer then it had for the other kids.

"Don't worry about them," the Hat assured him, "I take as long as I need. Hmm, I see a great need here to prove yourself. A great desire to surpass all expectations. I see here a knowledge of a potential future. Interesting. You are indeed your ancestor's true child. So you must be in SLYTHERIN!" The last part was shouted out to the entire Great Hall.

Before the Hat was removed, the Hat said, "Tell your father to come and talk to me. I must talk to the Gryffindor I have never sorted."

The Hat was pulled away. Tom looked up at Professor Dumbledore.

The professor smiled and said, "Off to your House now, Tom"

Tom nodded politely and walked calmly over to the Slytherin table. He sat down opposite Dolohov, who sneered at him but said nothing.

Tom watched as he was joined by Skullion Mulciber, Edward Nott, and Evan Rosier as the new Slytherin First year boys. Six girls were sorted into Slytherin. The quiet Penelope Midlands from the Express was joined by Tabitha Figg, Mary Greengrass, Laura Parkinson, Alicia Todweiter, and Sumta Xurana.

Once the final student, Sumta Xurana, was seated the Headmaster rose from his seat. "Welcome to another year of magical learning at Hogwarts. I am Professor Dippet. Before for we start with our feast, I would like to say a few words. We welcome two new staff members to our teaching staff for this term.

The first is Professor Slughorn. Professor Slughorn recently completed his Potions Mastery. He will also be taking over as Head of Slytherin House." The students of Slytherin House applauded but the rest of the Houses only made token gestures.

Professor Dippet waited for the clapping to stop. Then he introduced the very small man standing next to him. "Assistant Professor Flitwick will be joining us to teach the younger Charms classes. Professor Flitwick is completing his Charms Mastery with an apprenticeship to Professor MacTavish. Our new Charms teacher is also rated a master dueler." Some polite applause came for the small teacher.

"A reminder that the Forbidden Forest remains just that. Madam Pringle has posted a list of proscribed items from Zonko's on her office door. Please take the time to read her list. This includes you Professor Dumbledore." The older students all laughed at this last remark. Dumbledore just looked innocent.

With the first smile Tom had seen on the Headmaster's face, the professor said, "Let the feast begin!"

With a clap the tables filled with large bowls and dishes of the most wonderful food Tom ever smelled. All the students eagerly started to eat. The day on the Express prevented most of them from eating a full lunch. As it was now close to 8:30, the students were starved.

Tom felt a chill run up his spine and his left side turned cool. He glanced over to see a ghostly form hovering next to him and glaring. Mary Greengrass, sitting next to Tom, gave a squeal when she noticed the ghost.

“I-i-it’s the Bloody Baron!” Nott stammered out. Some of the older Slytherin students laughed at the fright of the First years.

Then the Baron floated closer to Tom. In a low whisper, the Baron said, “Welcome to the true Heir of the Founder.” Then the Baron nodded politely and drifted away.

The surprised look on Tom’s face was taken as more fear by the other students. Their laughing increased. Two sets of eyes noted it as surprise and not fear on Tom’s face. One sat at the Head Table and the other at the table with him. Tom, ignoring the laughter, concentrated on his meal and did not notice his watchers.

After the Welcoming Feast, Tom joined the other First years in following the two Slytherin Fifth year prefects down to the Slytherin Dorms in the Dungeons. As they approached a painting on the wall, the Prefects stopped and turned.

The Fifth year boy had introduced himself as Malcolm Fudge. “This is the entrance to the Slytherin Commons. We will tell you the password. None of the lesser Houses is to know it.”

The Slytherin female prefect, Georgianna Scandalfenie, added, “If the other Houses learn the password, we will find out who told.” Then she turned to the plain stone wall and said “Purity”. The wall slide back and over to reveal the opening to the Slytherin Common Room.

Tom followed the other First years into a long room with a low ceiling. Magical lamps hanging from chains gave off a greenish light. The walls and ceilings were rough stone. The floor was covered in a thick, plush carpet. A massive fireplace sat midway down the room. A

scattering of couches, tables and high backed chairs sat around the room. Tom counted ten doors leading out of the common room.

The older Slytherin students stood waiting along each side of the room. Based on their heights, Tom guessed they were lined up by years. Two older students stood in the center of the room facing the new Slytherin students. Tom assumed they were the Seventh year prefects.

Once all of the students were in and the common room door closed, the boy standing in the center started to speak. "Welcome to Slytherin House. We are the house of power. We are the ones of destiny. You will bare the responsibility of carrying on our tradition of greatness.

An image of Salazar Slytherin appeared between the two prefects. Now the girl started to speak. "The greatest of the Founders taught only the best students. Those students of cunning, ambition and power. You must prove yourselves worthy of the honor.

Tom wanted to snort at the cheap showmanship of the two prefects. Dad would have found this hysterical.

The boy picked up the rant. "I am Anthony Cumshaw-Parker. This is Cynthia Zindle. I am the Head Boy for this year. Cynthia is the Seventh year Prefect. There will be no fighting outside these walls within this House. Strive with each other but not where the lesser Houses may witness it. The Houses are our competition. We hone our skills for life now. Strive to surpass and dominate the other Houses."

Zindle added, "The school uses House points to determine standings. Our House strives both within and without. Grades and other achievements will earn you standing within the House."

The image of Salazar Slytherin dissolved to be replaced by a great hooded snake. "You will each approach the snake of Slytherin. The snake is our symbol. A snake is calm, cool, and patient. It stays out of sight until it is ready to strike. When it strikes, it strikes without hesitation or mercy."

Cumshaw glared at the First years. "You will approach our House symbol one at a time. You will face it for its acceptance. Now we start. Antonin Dolohov! Come forward!"

Dolohov strode forward with an arrogant stride. He walked to the waiting Seventh years. Stopping just before the snake, he glared at the image. The snake slithered around to stare into his eyes and hissed. Tom could not see the boy's face, but his shoulders seemed to shrink. Then the snake pulled back and seemed to nod.

Cumshaw announced, "Dolohov, you have been accepted. Step forward."

Dolohov stepped around the Seventh years and walked past them. When Zindle called out, "Tom Evans!", he sneered, "How did a mudblood get down here?" The words were not loud but students on both sides of the room heard them. It was whispers passed up and down both sides.

Tom stepped forward to stand before the snake. The snake gave Tom a nasty stare and hissed, Another one unworthy of the great Master.

Tom smirked at the snake and hissed back, What makes you say that?

Snakes can't really show expressions. Somehow this snake did. You speak the noble tongue? How is this possible?

I am Tom Evans, adopted son of James Evans. My mother was of the House of Gaunt.

The snake seemed to bow. You are of the line of the great Salazar Slytherin. It has been too much time since one of his line has stood before me. Be welcome in your House. The snake then pulled back from Tom.

Tom looked around and noticed that the room had gone silent. The other students stared at Tom in shock. Finally, Cumshaw asked, "Did you just speak to the snake?"

Tom's lips curled into a smirk again. In an innocent voice he asked, "Sure, can't everybody?"

Shock still on his face, the Head Boy motioned for Tom to join Dolohov. Tom walked over to the shocked First year. Tom noticed a glimmer of fear lurking in the larger boy's eyes. A sense of satisfaction ran down Tom's spine. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all.

The remaining First years passed through the rest of the ceremony. After Tom's encounter with the snake, most of the other First years made some type of display of courage while facing the snake. Mary Greengrass and Sumta Xurana simply stood their ground. The rest tried to out do Tom. Evan Rosier went so far as to hiss back at the snake. Tom winced when the hissing sound came out close to an insult. The magical image did not take kindly to the unintentional comment.

Tom sneered at their petty game of one-upmanship. He remembered his father's stories of the future their games would bring about. No other surprises occurred, although the snake kept turning around to peer at Tom. This really seemed to unnerve the other students to Tom's amusement.

After they were done, the two Fifth year prefects led the First years on a tour of the Slytherin dorm. Two of the doors led to the boys and girls dorms. The boys' dorms were one level down and underneath the girls' dorms. Each year had its own room.

The students were led into Slytherin House's private Potions lab. All kinds of potions ingredients and equipment filled the room. Tom was shocked. It was even better equipped than the lab Mum had at home. Dad told him that it seemed the Slytherins always seemed to be the strongest Potions students. It was no wonder if they had this and none of the other Houses did.

Tom was more excited to find the dueling practice area. The floor had a regulation dueling platform marked off. A magical shield to protect any observers from missed spells also surrounded the platform. Dad would have loved this. From what Dad said, the Gryffindor House dorms did not include anything like this.

After the tour, the students were dismissed to their rooms. Tom followed the other four boys into their new room. The room held a series of large beds colored in the green and silver of the House. The canopied beds were huge for eleven year old boys. Each of their trunks sat at the foot of their beds. Next to each bed were a wardrobe and a small desk.

The boys moved to their trunks and started getting ready for bed. Rosier complained, "Why didn't the house-elves put all of our stuff away?"

Tom dragged himself into his bed. He felt emotionally drained. Leaving home, riding the train and getting Sorted had pulled a lot out of him. The looks he was receiving from his new dorm mates made it even worse. No one was speaking to him just giving him weighing glances.

Tom wondered what today had been like for the Tom Riddle of Dad's past. Not knowing who his family was or his tie to Slytherin. What kind of greeting had he received on his first night?

A low growl interrupted Tom's musings. "I don't believe you really spoke to that snake. You were faking it."

Tom rolled over in his bed to look at the speaker. Not to his surprise, it was Dolohov. "Excuse me?"

"There is no way a half-blood like you could be a Parseltongue. Only the greatest of the Dark Wizards have had that gift. Not even Grindelwald has been granted that power."

Tom rolled back over, "He was also a Ravenclaw." Silence filled the room again.

"How do you know that?" asked a new voice.

Tom glanced up at the speaker. It was Skullian Mulciber. Mulciber was a stocky, somewhat chubby boy a little taller than Tom. "My father told me. I think he heard it from Dumbledore."

The boy sneered, "You would believe it coming from that blood traitor. He is a Muggle-lover."

"And you hate Muggles?"

"All right thinking Purebloods do!"

"Why?"

Mulciber and Dolohov took on matching looks of disgust. Mulciber answered, "They have no magic. They are beneath us. They are merely animals."

Tom pretended to consider this. Then asked, "Do you have a pet? Do you hate it?"

"So you are a Muggle-lover too!"

Tom realized he had gone too far. He would not survive in this room if he pushed them this hard. Raising an eyebrow, "Do I love them? No. However, I have very personal reasons for any hate I do have." Tom allowed a host of buried resentments rise up in his tone during his comment.

At the surprised silence, Tom again layback on his bed. The anger and hatred that rose to the surface surprised Tom. The images of the visit to the Riddles combined with his memories of the orphanage. The hate sat in his stomach like a ball of lead.

Tom felt the need to talk to his dad. He missed his mum and the twins. However, Dad understood. Dad knew the hatred that Tom felt. James had the same cause for hate Tom did.

Sleep was a long time coming that first night. Thoughts of all he had seen and done today ran through his head. As he finally drifted off to sleep, Tom could not shake the feeling that something was missing.

A/N: I am splitting this chapter in two parts. Originally, this chapter was supposed to include Tom's first day of classes. It got too long so I am posting it in two parts. Chapter 11 should be completed and up on Saturday, December 9th.

Thanks to all of the wonderful reviewers. I have been incorporating questions and comments made to improve the story. Some readers liked the James against the Nazis chapters. Some felt it distracted from the James-Tom main part of the story. I will have some of James's mission occurring again. (Maybe with Tom's involvement?) I may do some outtake chapters later using James from this story.

Chapter 11 – First Classes

The damp chill of the Slytherin dungeon made Tom reluctant to pull himself out of his warm, comfortable bed. The thick comforter trapped the heat and the mattress was perfect. In a sleepy haze, Tom wondered if the mattress was charmed to be respond to the desires of the person sleeping on it.

A loud gong rang in the First year boys' room. The Fifth and Sixth year male prefects came in yelling for the "ikle Firsties" to get out of bed. The other boys started to pull themselves out of bed. Tom reluctantly joined them.

Grabbing his things, Tom made his way to the showers. Although Tom had enjoyed the privacy of his own room for the last four years, growing up in the orphanage gave Tom a lot of experience in getting ready with a crowd of other boys scrambling around getting ready also. The other boys mostly ignored Tom while they dressed. Dolohov and Rosier joked between themselves while Mulciber and Nott finished dressing and left the room.

Tom left his room and walked up to the common room. A number of the older Slytherin students stood around talking in the large room. They clustered in small groups. Not much laughter was heard as Tom walked through the room. One or two groups stopped talking as Tom walked by to watch him. Tom felt very uncomfortable.

A small table sat empty not far from the main fireplace in the common room. Tom sat down and pulled a parchment and quill from his bag. He had half an hour before breakfast started so he decided to write his parents. He started writing about his impressions of the train ride when a shadow fell across his parchment. Tom looked up to find Mary Greengrass and Sumta Xurana standing next to the table.

Tom gave them a small smile and said, "Good morning"

Neither girl said anything for a moment. Then Greengrass replied, "Good morning." Then the petite blond girl sat gracefully in the chair across from Tom. "Why are you in Slytherin?"

The question surprised Tom. "Because the Hat put me here I guess."

Xurana sat in the chair between Tom and Greengrass. Tom glanced at the girl. She appeared to be of Persian descent. She had dark hair and eyes so dark they looked like black pearls. Even as an 11-year-old boy who was NOT into girls yet, Tom admitted to himself the girl was beautiful.

The dark girl smiled at Tom almost as if he made his assessment aloud. "We mean no offense with our question. I knew all of the others in Slytherin before I even arrived here, at least by family. You are the only anomaly."

Tom grinned, "Anomaly? What kind of 11 year old outside of Ravenclaw uses the word anomaly?"

Almost against her will Xurana grinned back. Mary Greengrass reclaimed their attention with a question, "I want to know how you talked to that snake last night. Are you really a Parselmouth?"

With a straight face, Tom answered, "Sure, isn't everybody?"

Greengrass shook her head, "No one is a Parselmouth! There hasn't been a known Parselmouth in over a hundred years!"

'Must be when the Gaunt family fell out of the Wizarding world,' Tom thought to himself. "Really," Tom commented with a sly smile, "are you sure of your information?" Then Tom looked at a clock on the wall. "Would you ladies care to join me for breakfast?"

The girls looked a little bemused by Tom's answer and his change of topic. They watched as Tom placed his parchment in his bag and stood up. After glancing at each other, they joined Tom in walking up to the Great Hall for breakfast.

As they walked out of the common room, Xurana asked, "Do you know any other Parselmouths?"

Tom ignored the question and asked, "Do you girls play Quidditch?" as he led them down the hall.

Mary allowed the change of subject again and answered, "I've played but my mother said it is not a proper sport for young ladies. Father says girls can't handle the pressure."

Tom snorted quietly at that answer. He would have loved to seen someone say to his Mum that she couldn't handle pressure. "My father played as a Seeker. He told me all of the Chasers on his team were girls."

"He obviously wasn't in Slytherin then. None of the Slytherin House teams have ever had a female player," Greengrass replied.

"I thought this was the house of the ambitious and cunning? Who cares where the talent comes from if it means you can win?"

Neither girls spoke another word as they walked into the Great Hall. As they sat down, Tom noticed the confused looks on their faces. Tom wasn't sure what he said to confuse them, but he could see it in their expressions. Tom started eating as the other Slytherin First years trickled into the Great Hall.

Tom observed the other Houses while he started eating. Hufflepuff seemed like they were having the most fun. A great deal of laughter came from that table. The Ravenclaw table was quiet. Many of the students already had texts opened in as they ate breakfast. Gryffindor held a mixed bag. Some students were joking quietly. Most were rather quiet. The table was mostly empty. Tom wondered if the House of the Brave was also the House of Late Sleepers.

"The Gryffindors are known for having a huge party the first night back," a voice said.

Tom turned to find Ed Nott had sat down next to him. "That seems stupid. Today is a Friday. Why not just wait until tonight so they can sleep in on Saturday. We do have classes today."

Nott snorted, "No one has ever called the Gryffidorks the smart house."

Tom grinned as he thought of his father's response to that statement. The thinking of some of Dad's stories, he thought, 'On the other hand, Dad might agree.'

Professor Slughorn passed by handing out the timetables for the Slytherin First years. "I will be meeting with all of the House by class today and tomorrow so I can get to know you. I will meet with the First years today at 3:00."

Tom looked at his schedule of classes.

Monday-

DADA 8-9 (Gryffindor)

Charms 10-11 (Hufflepuff)

Potions 1-2 (Gryffindor)

History of Magic 3-4 (Ravenclaw)

Tuesday-

Transfiguration 8-10 (Ravenclaw)

Astronomy 11-12 (Hufflepuff)

Herbology (1-2) (Hufflepuff)

History of Magic 3-4 (Ravenclaw)

Wednesday-

DADA 8-9 (Gryffindor)

Charms 10-11 (Hufflepuff)

Potions 1-2 (Gryffindor)

History of Magic 3-4 (Ravenclaw)

Thursday-

Transfiguration 8-10 (Ravenclaw)

Astronomy 11-12 (Hufflepuff)

Herbology (1-2) (Hufflepuff)

History of Magic 3-4 (Ravenclaw)

Friday-

Herbology 8-10 (Hufflepuff)

“Today shouldn’t be too bad.” Tom commented. “Only one class”

“It is not a wand classes though,” Nott grumped. “I wanted to use my wand today.”

The group around Tom got into a debate over the classes. Tom admitted to himself that he was disappointed he did not have Transfiguration or Defense today. Tom finished his breakfast and commented to Nott that he was going to get his books for class. Nott nodded around a mouthful of food and waved Tom off.

Tom arrived at the greenhouses before any of the other Slytherins. A couple of the Hufflepuffs stood in a group. The cast suspicious glances at Tom when they noticed his Slytherin robes. Tom gave them a big smile and waved. Now they looked confused. Tom snickered to himself. Dad had told him that once if you couldn’t do anything else, always mess with their heads..

The other Slytherin students arrived en masse. Surprisingly, Dolohov ignored Tom completely. No sneers, comments or gestures were made. Then Tom remembered the Head Boy’s comments from last night. No fights outside the House. Since the ‘puffs were here, Dolohov had to leave Tom alone. That was good to know. Greengrass and Xurana gave Tom small smiles in greeting. The rest followed Dolohov’s lead.

Tom didn’t really mind. He was enjoying being outside in the fresh air. Today was a perfect flying day. Too bad he had to leave his broom at home. Tom idly wondered what Snuffles was up to without him.

A middle-aged witch in brown robes and an apron walked out of a greenhouse. "Good morning, children! I am Professor Plantatia. I will be your Herbology professor. I am also Head of Hufflepuff House. Can anyone tell me the importance of studying magical plants?"

A small Hufflepuff girl raised her hand. At the professor's nod, she answered, "You need to understand the plants for potions making and treating any injuries from the plants."

The professor unleashed a wide smile, "Excellent! Two points for Hufflepuff!" The witch smiled. "Today we will tour the greenhouses and discuss the plants we will be reviewing this year. I must remind you not to touch anything. Some of the greenhouses you will not reenter again unless you take the NEWT-level classes." With a final nod, the professor called out, "Follow me!"

Tom walked back up to the castle surrounded by the other Slytherins. Herbology seemed okay to Tom, but he knew it would never be a favorite class. A couple of the Hufflepuffs and Laura Parkinson seemed excited by the material. Tom just looked forward to the Defense class.

Lunch passed quickly. Tom learned that Nott shared an interest in Quidditch. The two boys discussed the various teams and their chances of winning the championship this season. Nott told Tom he would like to play in goal for the Slytherin House team. Tom told Nott he would like to play Chaser or Seeker. Tom realized he liked the other boy's dry humor. Dolohov and the other boys ignored Tom and Nott. The girls kept to themselves but Tom felt them glancing over at him periodically.

When he made a comment to Nott about the strange glances, he was surprised at the response. "You really don't know?" When Tom shook his head, Nott supplied, "You are an unknown. This is Slytherin House. They are weighing if there are advantages to being your friend. Also you talking to that snake last night is throwing them off."

"Why aren't you affected then?"

Nott looked surprised. "Do you know who I am?"

“Edward Nott.”

“My father is the bloody Minister of Magic,” Nott said in lofty tones. Tom could hear subtle tones that indicated the tone was self-mocking rather than snobby as it sounded. “My family is the top of the social food chain. My grandfather was the Minister at one time also.”

Tom gave Nott a smile, “So you can talk to me because there is no one you can talk up to?”

Nott snorted, “Basically. I’ll admit I am also curious about you talking to snakes.”

“Everyone makes a big deal about that. Greengrass and Xurana were asking about it this morning before breakfast. It is not really a big deal.”

Tom caught Nott’s considering look as Tom returned to his lunch. Tom could tell the comment took him by surprise. Tom tried to change the subject. “Have you been taught any magic already?”

Nott shrugged, “I had a couple of tutors for reading, math and stuff. Also I had teachers for some etiquette and other things a Pureblood needs to know. Father wanted to send me to a wizard day school that opened in London, but Mother wouldn’t let me go.”

“Why not?”

Nott shrugged, “Don’t know really. I didn’t really care. I was enjoying my summer. Who wants to start classes early?”

Tom thought it was interesting the Minister thought about sending his son to the Phoenix school. Tom decided to test the waters. “I attended some classes at the Phoenix school. Basic Charms and Transfiguration mostly.”

Nott’s expression grew curious. “I thought it was all orphans at the school.”

"I actually am an orphan. I got adopted and live in Hogsmeade with my family. Dad thought it was a good idea for me to get some early education."

"So you are a muggle-born?" Nott asked.

Tom looked at him curiously. "Would it really make a difference?"

Nott shrugged and looked a bit embarrassed. "Umm, yes. I guess so. My grandfather is always saying the muggle-borns don't understand their place in society."

Tom grinned at the uncomfortable boy. "When you figure out what I am, let me know." At that point, Tom realized that all conversation around them had stopped. All of the Slytherins seemed to be listening. Tom continued, really addressing all of his listeners, "I think I will be an odd puzzle for you. I spent several years in the Muggle world and several in the Magical world. I could be a Pureblood, a half-blood or a Muggle-born. I guess you will have to decide my worth on your own."

Tom almost died laughing at the looks of consternation on his Housemates faces. He refused their easy categorizations. Tom could play this to from all sides. It was such a Slytherin thing to do.

After lunch, Tom, Nott, Greengrass and Xurana explored the castle. Tom wished Dad let him have the Marauders' Map. Mum was probably watching him right now. That thought caused Tom to snicker quietly.

After a couple of hours, the group decided to go back to the common room before the meeting with Professor Slughorn. As they approached the entrance to the common room, they found four Sixth or Seventh year Slytherins waiting for them.

"You three can go in, but the Mudblood stays out," one boy said.

"We don't want your type corrupting our House. We changed our password so you can't come in. Go talk to Dippet and get resorted," another added.

Tom looked at the other First years. "Go ahead. I'll be fine."

The others walked to the entrance. One of the older boys whispered the new password. Once the door opened all of them walked inside. Each of the First years glanced back at Tom as they walked through. Then the older boys walked in and shut the entrance behind them.

Tom stood alone in the corridor and was furious. How dare they try to exclude him! Tom felt the anger radiating off his body. The torches lining the walls seemed to flicker as a wave of magic rushed down the hall.

Tom felt a brief, comforting touch in the back of his mind. He turned half expecting to see his father standing behind him. No one was there but Tom felt calmed anyway. Tom seemed to feel his Dad with him.

Tom took a deep breath to calm himself. He started running through some of the simple Occulmency exercises Mum had taught him. Once he felt calm, Tom walked up to the entrance.

He hissed, Can you please open up.

A slight hiss was heard back. Who asks for me to open?

I am Tom Evans of Slytherin's line.

The entrance swung open with a bang. Enter Master's Heir

Tom strode into the Slytherin common room to the astonished stares of the other Slytherins. In a contemptuous voice, Tom asked, "Did you really think you could keep a Parselmouth out of the House of the Snake?"

The other students looked like rats caught in the gaze of a cobra. No one moved. They just looked at the cold blue eyes of Tom Evans. They had felt the wave of pure magic ripple through the walls. They had been stunned at the power of it even before the door slammed open.

Tom sneered at the motionless students and walked down to his dorm. Inside he wanted to cry. This would be a long seven years if he had to fight his own House the whole time.

Tom sat down and finished his letter home. After twenty minutes, he walked out of the still empty dorm room and into the common room. All of the other Slytherins still stood in the room talking quietly in small groups. Tom ignored them on his way to the Owlery. Tom paused in the common room entrance and glanced back. All of the conversations had stopped as they all watched him. Tom smiled back at them and walked out of the room.

The rest of the Slytherin First years stood outside Professor Slughorn's office already when Tom arrived. Dolohov stood with Rosier and Milciber with a scowl on his face as Tom approached. Nott stood a short distance away talking to Xurana and Greengrass. The remaining girls formed a third group.

Tom stopped a short distance away from any of the groups. They formed a square with Tom at one corner, Dolohov and his crew on the opposite corner and the other two groups on Tom's left and right.

Before a word could be said, Professor Slughorn opened his office door. "Welcome! Come right in and have a seat. There is pumpkin juice and biscuits on the table."

The Slytherins filed into the room. Tom took a seat towards the back of his Head of House's office. The office was rather spare. Marks on the walls indicated where frames had been recently removed. Tom did see a framed certificate proclaiming Slughorn's Potions Mastery dated two years ago hanging behind the desk. A bookcase filled with a variety of texts stood along on wall. Another cabinet with glass doors held a variety of potions ingredients. It looked like one of the magically secured cabinets Mum had at home in her potions lab.

The professor himself was a fairly young man for a professor, no more than twenty-five. He was short, barely over 5'2. He seemed to be expanding in the horizontal direction. He was already half as wide as he was tall. If he kept that up he would not be able to get down the Hogwarts's passageways!

The professor took a seat and smiled at his young charges. "I would like to welcome you all to this chance to get to know each other and me. Obviously I was a Slytherin during my time here. I left school in 1931. I then started on my potions mastery with the famous Potions

Master Collagula Prince. Since then I have been working on development of secret potions for the Department of Mysteries.”

Tom snorted. If the professor really had been working for the Department of Mysteries, it would be the last thing he admitted to especially to a group of First year Slytherins. Tom decided to play with him a bit. “Are you helping in the fight against Grindelwald, sir?”

Professor Slughorn gave Tom a sly smile. He said, “I couldn’t comment on that,” while his whole being seemed to scream out, “Yes, I am!”

Slughorn turned to Nott and asked him to introduce himself. Nott commented on his father’s position. Slughorn seemed fascinated. Tom learned that Mulciber’s father owned a apothecary in Knockturn Alley. Evan Rosier’s parents worked as Aurors and his great-uncle Fergus invented the self-sealing potions beaker. Dolohov’s father had been a curse-breaker for Gringotts before a particularly nasty Egyptian curse got him. Tabitha Figg’s family were part owners of the Cannons. Mary Greengrass revealed her family owned the largest chain of magical greenhouses in Britain. Sumta Xurana’s family owned a large import-export business between England and the Middle East. Laura Parkinson and Alicia Tadweiter turned out to be cousins. Their families both worked in the Ministry in senior positions. Penelope Midland’s father worked as a Healer at St. Mungos. Her mother taught at the Phoenix school.

Tom snorted quietly when Penelope mentioned the Phoenix school. Unfortunately, not quietly enough. Penelope turned and glared at Tom.

“There is nothing wrong with teaching in a school for orphans!” she hissed at him.

Tom grimaced and looked at Nott. Nott understood his request. “Tom is an orphan, Penelope. He told me at lunch he took classes at the Phoenix school.”

Penelope blushed. “Sorry, I thought you were laughing at me.”

Slughorn felt the tension in the air. He looked at Tom and said, "You seem to be the final student. Tell me about yourself." The other students turned to look at Tom.

"My name is Tom Evans. My parents are James and Sarah. We live in Hogsmeade."

Professor Slughorn looked surprised at this simple answer. Dolohov snorted, "What, are they the village drunks?"

Tom returned a slight smirk. "No, we are just private."

Penelope frowned slightly, "I have heard of James Evans before. It was a couple of years ago."

Laura Parkinson looked at Tom in surprise. "Is he the same man who beat my cousin, Abraxus Malfoy, in a demonstration dual a couple of years ago?"

Tom simply shrugged without answering. The others were glancing between Tom and Laura unsure what to believe.

Professor Slughorn looked at Tom speculatively, "I heard about a James Evans teaching magical combat classes to Aurors."

Tom shook his head, "Shouldn't I be bragging about all of that if it were true? We like our privacy. Dad retired and moved to Hogsmeade. He adopted me. End of story."

Dolohov snorted, "So you were adopted by some old guy." Tom ignored him.

"Who were your birthparents?" Mary asked.

Tom shrugged again. "They don't really matter anymore. I never knew them. I only have one set of parents."

An uncomfortable silence settled on the room with Tom's answer. After a minute, Professor Slughorn stood up and thanked the students for coming to see him. After a short, meaningless speech

about his office door always being open, Slughorn moved the group out of his office.

Tom walked out in front of everyone else, keeping himself isolated. The others followed him back to the Slytherin dungeons without further comment.

Tom spent the rest of the afternoon in the common room reading his Transfiguration text. Having met Professor Dumbledore many times through his father, Tom was determined to excel in the class. Nott and Greengrass sat playing wizard chess at a nearby table. Xurana sat in a chair across from Tom reading her Potions book.

Tom wondered if he was starting to feel comfortable with the three other Slytherins. He had never had a true friend his own age before. At the orphanage, Tom was the freak. The occasional accidental magic highlighted the difference the kids felt. Dad had commented the same thing happened to him in primary school. Dad theorized that young Muggle children still believed in magic enough to sense the magic contained within a witch or wizard. This indescribable difference caused the kids to make them outcasts as “freaks”.

Moving to Hogsmeade did not help matters a whole lot. No other children were close to Tom's age. Being a muggle-raised wizard, Tom did not instinctively understand the magical world like the other children did. So Tom had Snuffles as his true friend. The giant dog served as his friend and confidant.

The other three Slytherins treated Tom in a friendly fashion. Tom was sure Nott was right and part of it was the curiosity factor. However, Tom also saw the looks on their faces as they walked into the common room when the older boys tried to lock Tom out. Now they voluntarily sat with Tom as they waited on dinner. Tom glanced around at the other three. Yes, they could be friends.

The next morning, Tom and his three new friends sat in the Great Hall eating breakfast. Not many of the older students arrived before 9:00. Tom was still too excited being at Hogwarts to sleep in for long. The other three dragged themselves to the Great Hall with Tom.

A sudden commotion occurred outside the Great Hall doors. One of the doors pushed open and a huge black dog pushed his way into the room. With his tongue hanging out, Snuffles ran over to Tom and jumped up on the bench.

“Snuffles!” Tom cried out in excitement as many of the other students in the Great Hall yelled in a brief panic.

“What is that mutt doing in here?” Georgiana Scandalfenie asked. The Slytherin prefect sounded appalled about the dog’s presence.

Noticing a note tied to Snuffles neck, Tom grinned at her. “Don’t worry, he is a mail dog.”

Before the girl could unleash on Tom, another voice interceded. “I see your friend has found you, Mr. Evans.”

Tom turned to grin up at Professor Dumbledore. “Yes, professor. I guess he caught my scent. He had a note attached to him.”

The Transfiguration teacher smiled down on the First year with a twinkle in his eye. “I dare say you are correct. I suggest you read your letter. Have a good day, Mr. Evans. Ms. Scandalfenie.” Then he walked away.

The prefect walked away without another word. Nott leaned forward and whispered, “How did you get Dumbledore to stand up for you? I heard he hates Slytherins.”

Tom frowned, “I don’t think the professor is capable of hating anyone. If anything his fault lies in the other direction. Dad says Professor Dumbledore is too willing to only see the positives of the person and misses or ignores their weaknesses.”

Xurana asked, “So you met the professor before?”

“I live in Hogsmeade,” Tom shrugged. “Sooner or later all of the staff comes into the village. He is friendly with my dad.”

Tom opened the note-

Dear Tom,

Congratulations on being Sorted into Slytherin. Now we just need a Ravenclaw and we have a complete set! I hope you are settling in with your new Housemates.

If you need anything or just need to talk, send me an owl. I know going to school is a big change for you.

Snuffles has been driving your Mum spare. He spent all night on the First howling on your bed. I had to use a Silencing Charm on him so the twins could sleep. I suspect he will find you when I let him out this morning. I talked to Professor Dippet about Snuffles. He is not allowed to stay at the castle but he is allowed up to visit on the weekends. At least someone from the family will get to see you on a regular basis!

Take care. Your Mum, the twins and I miss you.

Dad

Tom smiled at his father's note. Snuffles butted into Tom to get some attention.

"So you gave Mum a hard time? Did you keep an eye on the twins for me?" Snuffles gave a low woof. Tom tossed Snuffles a piece of sausage and looked at his friends. "I am going to take Snuffles outside. Why don't you come out when you are done eating?" The three Slytherins nodded and watched as the small boy walked out of the Great Hall with the huge black dog.

Nott snickered and said, "Tom's dog is so big he could almost ride him."

Xurana looked at the other two. "That was an oriental Spirit Guardian, a magical breed of dogs. They are supposed to be very intelligent and highly resistant to magic. I have never seen one that large before."

The three students sat wondering on the expanding riddle of their new friend.

Tom, Snuffles and the three Slytherins spent much of the weekend wandering the castle grounds. Tom had explored much of it during his summers and he guided the others around to various areas. As First years, they had no responsibilities or homework so their time was completely free. Tom enjoyed getting to know his friends better.

Edward Nott fully expected to be Minister of Magic one day. His family would accept nothing less from him. After two generations in the office, the family had come to see the position as almost hereditary. Tom knew the current Minister Nott supported the British PM Chamberlain. In fact, the Minister of Magic was in Germany right now with the Prime Minister negotiating with Hitler and Grindelwald. Nott told the three his father and Chamberlain had established the best working relationship between the Magical and Muggle governments in centuries. Based on the little Dad said about the past in his timeline, the war was coming. Tom didn't say anything but wondered how the coming war would impact his friend.

Tom found Mary Greengrass and Sumta Xurana to be a lot of fun to be around. Both girls were very different from each other but both had a good sense of humor. Growing up in pureblood households neither knew much about the Muggle world. (Tom was impressed with the amount Nott did know) Tom enjoyed telling them about the different Muggle inventions like airplanes and the telephone. The girls were surprised that the Muggles could equal the ability of the Floo for rapid communication.

The weekend turned out much better than Tom ever expected. He really grew to like and start trusting his new friends. More importantly, Snuffles liked all three. Dolohov, Rosier, and Mulciber tried to harass them at one point but Snuffles growled at them until they left.

Late on Sunday afternoon, Snuffles wagged his tail and ran home to the village. Tom felt sad to see his friend leave but he remembered his father's agreement with the Headmaster. Tom appreciated what his father had done in sending Snuffles. The presence of the big dog allowed Tom feel protected while getting to know his new friends. Tom smiled briefly to himself as he walked back into the castle. Some times it was scary how well Dad knew him.

The Slytherin First years walked into their first Defense Against the Dark Arts class. The Gryffindor students were already in their seats on the other side of the room. The room was divided by a scaled down dueling platform. Chairs on platforms were on both side and back of the platform. The professor's desk sat at the top of the U.

Tom sat in the top row between Xurana and Greengrass. Nott sat on the other side of Mary. Tom looked over the Gryffindor students. They had a larger group then the Slytherins. Seventeen Gryffindors sat opposite eleven Slytherins. They had nine boys and eight girls. Tom recognized one or two from the Hogwarts Express but he had never spoken to any of them.

"Good morning, class."

Tom turned to see an older witch entering the classroom from a side door. She was of medium height with iron grey hair tied into a bun. The professor carried a small pile of books over to her desk and set them down. Then she turned to the class. Tom got a quick sense she was not a woman to be crossed.

"Good morning. I am Professor Merrythought. I have taught this class for more then thirty years. It is possible I may have taught some of your parents. Before teaching, I was an Auror for thirty years.

In the next seven years you will be taught to deal with all manner of Dark threats. This will include dueling, Dark creatures, and cursed objects. Some of this will be taught in conjunction with other subjects. For example, when we study Dark creatures in your Third and Fourth years, it will be done in conjunction with your Care of Magical Creatures class.

We live in dangerous times. A Dark wizard has taken control of the Ministry of a European country. It will become a haven for Dark creatures and wizards. Like an infected body, the rot may spread to our shores. We must always be prepared."

The professor called roll by House. She paused a couple of times as individual names were called out and she recognized the family. She did a barely perceptible pause when she called out Tom Evans, but she proceeded on without looking up after he answered her.

Setting her class list aside, the professor asked, "When fighting the Dark, what is the most important weapon in our arsenal? Yes, Mr. Brown?"

A dark haired Gryffindor answered, "Our wand?"

"Incorrect. Mr. Jones?"

A black Gryffindor with the darkest skin Tom had ever seen answered, "Knowledge, ma'am?"

"Close, but also incorrect. Mr. Evans?"

"Our wits, professor"

"Correct. Five points to Slytherin. Why do you answer that, Mr. Evans?"

Tom answered, "Our wand won't help use in every situation. Knowledge won't help if we are frozen or indecisive. We need our wits to judge the situation and chose the best course of action."

The professor raised an eyebrow at that answer from a First year. "You have discussed this before." It was not a question.

"Yes, professor," Tom acknowledged. "My father taught me a bit. He said wizards get so caught up in being magical they often fail to think about other solutions."

Several of the students looked surprised at Tom's comment. The Gryffindors seemed the most surprised to hear that coming from a Slytherin. Tom's fellow Slytherins did not comment, except Xurana's congratulations on gaining the points. The professor smiled briefly and continued with her lecture.

After DADA ended, Tom and his friends walked to their Charms class. The Slytherins walked in two groups now. One was made up of Dolhov, Rosier and Mulciber. The remaining First year Slytherin girls had joined Tom and his friends. Xurana made a point of pulling the girls into their group.

When Tom teased her on it not being proper Slytherin behavior, she answered, "Being cunning does not mean you work alone. The Quidditch team would not be too successful if we only sent out one player."

Nott laughed at that. "Have you seen our Quidditch team? The only reason we win is the best equipment and talent. Our team work is horrible."

Mary laughed, "You just proved her point, Edward."

The laughing group walked into the Charms classroom. The new Charms professor, Flitwick stood on a small platform in the front of the room. The professor obviously had a fair amount of goblin blood in him. Even on the platform, the professor only came to eye level with the First years.

"Great," Dolohov rumbled, "a half-blood."

Before the professor could say anything, Tom called out, "Excuse him professor. He let his brain out for a stroll and it hasn't returned yet." In a mock whisper Tom turned to now and said, "I understand the poor thing has been neglected for years."

The Hufflepuffs in the room startled themselves by laughing at a joke by a Slytherin. They were used to the jokes being made at their expense. Professor Flitwick looked torn between reprimanding Dolohov and laughing himself.

"Please take your seats, class" the diminutive professor called out.

After the class was seated, the professor introduced himself. "I am Professor Flitwick. I am an associate professor here while I complete work on the Charms Mastery. I will be teaching First through Fourth years and tutoring the older classes. Before taking this position, I toured on the professional dueling circuit. I won both the Chinese Imperial Magical Open and the European Open during my time on the circuit.

Charms is the most fundamental wand class you will take in school. Most of your household and defensive magic is based on charms! We

will learn charms for all types of occasions including household and entertainment. By your Seventh year, you will be introduced to wards and healing charms. Now, lets get started!

Tom reached the conclusion that the new Charms professor was way to enthusiastic about his subject, but it made the class fun. He started teaching the class a simple levitation charm for inanimate objects. He promised the class they would play a form of Muggle tennis using the spell after everyone learned the spell. It sounded interesting.

After lunch, the Sytherins made their way out back to the dungeons for potions class. Tom was in a foul mood. Dolohov had tried to get Tom in trouble with the House prefects for his remarks before Charms. Tom defended his actions saying it was stupid to offend the new professor for no reason.

Fortunately, Anthony Cumshaw-Parker, the Head Boy, was in the common room when Dolohov started his rant. He had just asked the associate Charms professor for some help revising for his NEWT exam, having his House offend the teacher would not help his cause. So the Head Boy told Dolohov to shut up and not bring shame on the House.

Dolohov sulked at the public (at least in the House) put down. His eyes promised Tom he would pay for making Dolohov look bad. Rosier looked a bit uneasy but it was clear Mulciber would back him up.

Sitting down in Potions, Nott asked Tom. "Was that the real reason you put Dolohov down?"

Tom snorted, "Partially. Also he really is an idiot who is nothing but a bully. I had more then my fill of that sort when I was in the orphanage. Magical or Muggle, a bully is the same in both worlds."

Professor Slughorn stumped into the Potions lab from his office. "Good afternoon, Mr. Nott. I understand your great father is on his way to ensure war does not touch our shores."

"Err, yes professor. He is in Munich right now." Nott answered.

“Excellent!” the professor beamed. Then he walked by with only a curious glance at Tom.

Nott leaned over and whispered, “I hate people that suck up because of my father.”

Tom could only nod his agreement.

“Welcome to the wonderful world of potions class. I am Professor Horace Slughorn. A mastery of Potions is the greatest skill of subtlety in the magical world. In this class, you will learn to mix ingredients in an exacting manner. The act of brewing will allow your magic will infuse your potions with power. You will be able to brew luck, bottle love and heal the deepest wounds.”

The professor handed out a small book. “This is a reference guide that contains over 1,500 common potions ingredients. You will find information outlining special handling and mixing, plus what not to mix.”

The professor waved his wand at the front board. “Now, I present to you a simple potion. You will brew this potion over the next 30 minutes. When you are done, I expect you to tell me what it would be used for.”

Tom admitted that seemed like an interesting assignment. Nott pulled out their equipment while Tom went for their needed ingredients.

Tom enjoyed his Potions class. Working with Mum helped but it was nice to work with Edward. They worked well together. They finished their potion (it was a curative for heartburn) and were assigned 14 inches on alternate ingredients that would make the potion more effective.

Nott and Xurana each earned Slytherin five points during potions. Edward answered the question of what the potion was for first. Xurana asked why another ingredient wasn’t used against a more expensive ingredient. The Gryffindor students earned a couple of points also.

The group walked out with a high level of excitement. The potions class turned out to be much more interesting than they had expected. The excitement lasted 30 seconds after they entered the History of Magic classroom.

Old Professor Binns stood at a podium in front of the class as they filed in to the room. As soon as the bell sounded, Binns started talking about the importance of Hoblock the Barbaric and the 29 Goblin Rebellions in wizarding history.

The professor spoke in a slow, flat tone for the entire class period. He never varied his inflection or changed his volume. Tom passed Nott a note asking if boredom was the goblins' new way of killing off wizards. Nott snorted in response. The professor never looked up.

After class, Nott wanted to walk up and touch the professor.

"Why?" Mary asked.

"I think maybe he died and his ghost just kept going. No one living could be that boring!"

Tom did not understand when his Mum told him the relayed comment left his dad in hysterical laughter.

Tuesday morning finally had Tom arriving in Professor Dumbledore's classroom. This was the last of the wand classes the Slytherins had yet to attend. Many in Slytherin House disliked the professor for his support of Muggle-born. They saw him as weak. Many speculated he had been a Gryffindor or Ravenclaw when a student. Tom kept quiet about the fact he had been a Slytherin according to his father.

The Transfiguration classroom was a warm, friendly place. Professor Dumbledore stood in front of the classroom with a smile. His long auburn beard hung down in front of his dark purple robes. Tom thought he looked like the stereotypical wizard out of a Muggle fantasy story.

With a pronounced twinkle in his eye, the professor started, "How wonderful it is to see so many ready young minds starting their education in the realm of transfiguration. This class is simply about

using magic to enact your desire on another object or creature. For example, I would like a nice cup of tea.”

The professor drew his wand and tapped a small wooden cube on his desk. An instant later it was a teacup filled with hot tea.

“Now, I would like a comfortable chair to sit in.” An instant later a Muggle reclining chair appeared in the front of the class. The professor sat down with his mug. “The keys to transfiguration are to maintain a clear image in your head of what you desire and then finding the correct spell to efficiently release your magic to match your will.”

The professor stood and made the chair and teacup disappear. “Today we will start with a simple exercise. Ms. Parkinson, please hand out the toothpicks on my desk. Class, we will start with transfiguring these toothpicks into pins. A very similar size and shape, one wood, the other metal. You will earn a passing grade in today’s class if it changes to metal all the way through.”

Xurana and a Ravenclaw named Boot were the first to get the transfiguration correct. Tom and Nott eventually picked it up. They were both in about the middle of the class. Tom smiled at the professor as he walked out of the classroom after the class was done.

That night, Tom sat in the Slytherin classroom and wrote a letter home to his family. Nott and the Slytherin First year girls sat at the table with him working on homework or playing little magical games. Xurana sat reading *Hogwarts: A History*.

Dear Mum and Dad,

We have now attended all of our classes. DADA, Potions, Charms, and Transfiguration were all brilliant. The teachers seemed very interesting. I earned 5 points in DADA.

Astronomy and Herbology were okay. The professors seem okay but I wasn’t too excited by the class. History of Magic was the worst! My friend Edward Nott thinks the professor must be dead already. We all thought we were going to be bored to death. All he talks about are

Goblin Wars. Didn't anything else ever happen? I wish I was finished my OWLS already so I could drop this class!

We started getting homework already. (Yes, mum, it is already done.)

Thanks for sending Snuffles to visit. It really helped. I have started making some friends here in my House. Edward Nott is the only guy I have met that I get along with. The other guys in my dorm are idiots. The Slytherin girls are fun though. Mary Greengrass and Sumta Xurana are very friendly and have good senses of humor. Snuffles liked them too. I haven't really met anyone outside Slytherin yet. I will follow your advice Dad and make an effort, but first I wanted to get to know my Housemates.

I miss you all! Kiss the twins for me!

Love,

Tom

PS It is not fair only Third years and above get Hogsmeade weekends. Dad, can I borrow your old map? (Hint, hint!)

A/N: Thank you to all of the reviewers. I may not respond to all of you directly but I am trying to work the answers to your questions into the story as I go along. So keep the questions and comments coming!

To answer one question though: I haven't decided if Tom will develop a love interest while at Hogwarts, but it won't occur before years 4 or 5. At this point, he is 11 and would rather play with Snuffles!

Chapter 12 – Preparing for War

1 November 1938

James awoke to the sound of Katie giggling next to him. James rolled over to look at the little lady laying next to him. “Good morning, Angel.”

From his other side a voice commented, “Angel? You get up at 3 in the morning with this ‘angel’ next time.”

James pulled his daughter close and said, “You were just excited for your first birthday. Weren’t you?” James smiled at his one-year-old daughter. “Is Michael still asleep?”

Sarah sighed as she lay back down next to her husband and daughter. “He never made a peep all night, unlike the little fireball next to you.”

Katie giggled again seeming to sense she was the topic of her mother’s comments. James smiled at her. Never in his previous life would he have been able to imagine he would be able to live this life.

During school, Harry spent every year fighting for survival. After learning the prophecy, Harry concentrated on survival. Training in combat and related magics filled Harry’s life. Harry’s friends and the DA trained with him but the burden was always on Harry. Harry and Ginny’s only fights as a couple dealt with Harry’s refusal to discuss their lives together after defeating Voldemort. Harry focused all of his energies on finding the Horcruxes and killing Voldemort.

Surviving the battle, but losing Ginny and everyone else Harry considered family was the ultimate irony. Hermione with her plans to research the blending of magic and muggle technology, Ron’s plans of a Quidditch career with the Canons, and Ginny’s comments about raising her own Quidditch team were all lost in that final battle. Neville and Luna were lost before, ambushed by the three LeStranges with four other Death Eaters. The pair took their attackers with them, but Madam Pomfrey could do nothing to prevent their deaths. The rest of the Order of the Phoenix, the DA and the Weasleys died in the final battle or the numerous battles and skirmishes leading up to it.

James smiled sadly at his daughter. Adopting Tom had started James on the recovery from all of Harry's loss. Finding Sarah and falling in love seemed a miracle. Katie and Michael seemed to close something for James. He could put Harry behind him. It truly did seem something that happened to another person.

Sarah asked a question pulling him out of his thoughts. "I am sorry. What did you ask?"

"I asked when you are going up to Hogwarts?"

"After breakfast," James answered. "My meeting with Albus is at 10. The First year Slytherins and Ravenclaws will be finishing their class then."

"Don't do anything to embarrass Tom. You know he is having a hard time fitting into his House."

Giving his wife an innocent "who, me?" look, James got out of bed and walked out to the kitchen with Katie. He almost escaped when his wife's comment caught him. "Yes, you Mr. My-Father-was-a-Marauder!"

Bouncing his daughter in his arms, James asked his daughter, "Why do magical people insist on giving titles with hyphens all through them?"

The little girl gurgled happily at the sound of her father's voice.

James entered Hogwarts an hour before his meeting. It still felt like coming home. The halls were empty as most students attended their morning classes. Those not in classes would most likely be in the library or their common rooms. James enjoyed wandering down the halls.

Nearly-Headless Nick wandered by with the Bloody Baron. James nodded a polite greeting as the two ghosts glided past. Neither ghost knew him in this time so took no special notice of the dark haired man walking by.

James walked past the second floor girls' bathroom. He was almost tempted to visit Moaning Myrtle but realized she wouldn't have been killed in his timeline for another five years.

Two thoughts came to James when this recognition came to him. The first thought was the Basilisk would not kill Myrtle because Tom would not let it out to attack students. Therefore, no Moaning Myrtle would ever haunt this bathroom. This led James to the question, how much of my history am I changing?

When Harry agreed with Aberforth to come back, Harry only saw the chance to save his friends. However, James did not kill Tom Riddle. James also did not leave the magical community to live in obscurity. From this time forth, history could change drastically. At a minimum, none of the people killed in the first war with Voldemort would be killed. They would have their own children. This could cause people married in Harry's timeline to be married to other people. Would Harry James Potter ever be born? Would any of his friends be born either? James leaned against the wall as he considered the potential ramifications.

After several minutes, James started to slowly walk the halls again. He considered all of the philosophical and theoretical issues involved. Harry's decision to charge into the past could have potentially catastrophic impacts on the world Harry knew.

James approached the door to the Transfiguration classroom just as the time of his appointment approached. The classroom door swung open and a horde of First year Slytherin and Ravenclaw students poured out. The lump of Slytherin students comprised of two boys and five girls caught James' eye.

The group was caught up in an animated discussion and did not notice James near by. With a grin, James slowly drew his wand. A mumbled spell later and a series of shrieks erupted from the group of Slytherins. Where a brown haired Slytherin boy had stood now stood a half-grown wolf pup.

James started to laugh as the pup let out a startled yelp as he discovered his transfiguration. The wolf cub whirled around and spotted James. With a growl, the cub ran at James and started

barking at his feet. James laughed even harder as the cub jumped up and tried to bite on James's robes.

James noticed the Slytherin girls and the one boy watching the scene from ten feet away. James grinned at them, "My, he is an excitable little guy, isn't he?" The Slytherins looked at each other, unsure what to make of the situation.

James pointed his wand at the cub and smiled. The cub, seeing the smile, turned tail (literally) and ran away. "*Perfectus Totalis!*" The cub tumbled to a stop as his legs and the rest of his body locked up.

With the stunned students looking on, James walked over and picked up the frozen cub. "Aren't you a cute little guy?" Looking at the Slytherin girls, James said, "I need to talk to Professor Dumbledore. Would one of you please look after this little guy until my meeting is over?"

The pretty blonde Slytherin girl nodded her head slowly. With an innocent smile, James handed her the cub. The wolf looked at James with a wild look in his eyes. James smirked and said, "Constant Vigilance!" Then James walked into the classroom leaving behind a group of confused Slytherins.

As James entered the room, an amused voice asked him, "Was that very nice?"

James looked as Professor Dumbledore (It still freaked James out to see the younger professor with brown hair and beard) and smiled. "Probably not, but it was fun."

"Based on my experience with young Mr. Evans he will attempt revenge."

James nodded, "I'd be disappointed if he didn't. Should be fun." James shrugged, "It drives Sarah crazy, but I am just keeping up the family tradition. I never got to when I was in school. Things were too serious."

The Transfiguration professor smiled, his eyes twinkling. "I seem to remember the last big prankster to walk these halls was Thomas Potter."

James smirked back, "Funny, the last time Sarah and I dined with the Potters, I heard his favorite prank-war opponent had the last name Dumbledore."

"Perhaps."

James smiled at the innocent expression on his former (future?) professor's face. "It will wear off soon. I would love to see his face if he is sitting on one of the girl's lap when it does."

Professor Dumbledore opened the cabinet behind him and brought out the Sorting Hat. "I understand you wished to speak with the Sorting Hat?"

"Actually, Tom told me the Hat is the one doing the requesting. Thank you." James took the battered looking Sorting Hat and placed it on his head. The Hat seemed to grow a bit as it dropped over his eyes.

"Ah, Mr. Evans, I presume. You have remarkably tight mental defenses. Even Albus's are not as significant."

"I have some good reasons to keep my mind my own." James replied. "My son said you wanted to speak to me?"

"Would you please lower your shields? I am curious. Mr. Evans thinks you were a Gryffindor, yet I know I never sorted you."

James mentally shrugged, "I am sorry. I need a better reason to lower my mental defenses than your curiosity."

The Hat snorted, "At least you are more polite than most who sit under me. Mr. Evans, the Founders gave me several charges when I was created. I saw in your son's mind that he talked to the painting hanging at the Potters. I need to know."

James frowned slightly and then lowered his shields. In an instant, James felt the Hat looking through his memories.

“My other self must have had a very difficult time sorting you, Mr. Potter. Your plan coming back is very Slytherin but it was done with a Gryffindor’s courage. You have a true Hufflepuff’s loyalty to your friends. Not many would have risked such a costly victory on such an endeavor. I am impressed, Mr. Potter.

Rowena Ravenclaw did a great deal of study on time travel. Her work has been lost, but I will share her conclusions with you.” Feeling James’s nodded, the Hat said, “History is not so easily changed by time travel. Imagine a river. A large stone thrown in may cause a temporary disruption, but eventually the river returns to its normal flow. You can change the names and circumstances, but certain events and actors must be played out.”

James felt dismayed at these words. “You mean I have done this for nothing?”

“No,” the Hat answered,” not for nothing. Some things in history are destined to be. You may be able to change some of the details or actors, but there will be a cost to balance this change. I don’t know what the cost will be, merely that there will be one.”

James sat quietly for a moment and considered what the Hat said. “I have another question. I have been here for more then four years now, yet I haven’t aged. Why not?”

“You are still tied to the TimeTurner. Its magic will return you to the future in the same physical state as when you left.”

“Can I break the tie?”

James felt the Hat shrug mentally, “I don’t know. Rowena never tried to do that.”

“Whatever happens, Mr. Potter-Evans, I would like to thank you. Your son is the best chance we have ever had with changing the direction of Slytherin House. Each generation I have seen that House get Darker and further from the other Houses. The Founders never meant the Houses to become known solely for single traits. Helga was one of the bravest people I have ever known. Rowena had a sly wit. Godric was loyal to an extreme. Salazar could be impulsive. If I

had to sort them, I am not sure they would all end up in the Houses they founded. I look forward to what the new, hidden line of Potters with an Heir of Slytherin will do. I predict great things.”

James smiled at that. “Thank you. I have more questions now than answers but it is a start.”

The Sorting Hat replied, “Good luck to you, Mr. Evans.”

James reached up and removed the Hat from his head. Professor Dumbledore sat watching him. “That was an interesting experience.”

“Indeed, James.” Albus agreed. “The Hat rarely talks to anyone but the Headmasters. You are an exceptional case.”

James gave Albus a wary smile, “That is the story of my life.”

The two wizards made small talk for a bit. Albus was interested in some of the new subjects the Phoenix Foundation had introduced. James told him about the Wizard Studies class. The class mirrored the Muggle Studies class at Hogwarts but told the Muggle-born students about the magical culture. The class included magical law and government, traditions and basic tips for living in the magical world. James explained it covered all of the things a wizard-born child would learn as part of their environment growing up.

James pointed out, “Part of the reason pure-bloods feel superior is they already understand the culture and background information. They are not magically stronger on average but they usually score higher on average because of their background.”

Dumbledore considered that. “An intriguing idea. It would never have occurred to me.” He glanced at the clock. “I have a class coming in soon. We will have to discuss this further at a later time.”

James stood and grasped the professor’s hand. “Send me and owl and we can meet at the Three Broomsticks one night.”

James left the Transfiguration classroom and made his way towards the front doors. Along the way, he was accosted by a certain Slytherin First year.

“Dad! That was evil!”

With an innocent expression, James answered his son, “Problem, son?”

Tom gave him a disgusted expression. “Yes, Xurana decided to cuddle me and ‘kiss the puppy’ when I suddenly turned back. I ended up on her lap with her kissing my cheek!”

James laughed until he had tears in his eyes and his ribs hurt much to the disgust of his son. “I am sorry!” James forced out between fighting to get air into his lungs. “I thought you would get away from them.”

“I never had a chance!” Tom shouted indignantly. “They passed me around so much my paws never touched the ground!”

James calmed down a bit. “I am sorry. I couldn’t resist the temptation. Speaking of temptation, would you happen to know what happened to the plate of chocolate biscuits your mother made last week?”

Now Tom wore an almost identical expression as James wore earlier. “Mum made biscuits?”

“It was the strangest thing. She made them Friday night and left them on the kitchen counter. They were missing when we got up on Saturday morning.”

“Maybe Snuffles got into them,” Tom suggested.

“Hmm,” James pretended to consider, “maybe, but then I am impressed he put the empty plate in the sink.”

“Ooops”

James and Tom started laughing together at the quasi-admission of guilt.

“Can you join us for lunch, Dad? I want you to meet my friends,” Tom asked.

"I am afraid I can't stay for lunch today. I have to be in London at 12. Why don't I meet them all now before lunch?" At Tom's happy agreement, Tom and James walked together down to the Great Hall.

Tom led James down to the Slytherin common room. Entering the dungeons, James felt an odd sense of déjà-vu. At a nondescript portion of the wall, Tom hissed at the wall and it opened. Then he smirked at his father.

James only comment was, "I wish I had thought of using parseltongue." Stepping into the common room, James murmured to himself, "I didn't even need to use polyjuice."

Tom grinned at his dad (he knew the story) and said, "Over here dad." Tom led James over to a gaggle of First year Slytherins. The group looked up as the two approached.

"Hi," Tom greeted them. "Everyone, this is my dad, James Evans. Dad, this is Ed Nott, Mary Greengrass, Penelope Midlands, Laura Parkinson, Sumta Xurana and Alicia Tadweiter."

James smiled at all of them and said hello. Three of those family names meant Death Eater to his instincts. Fortunately, Tom's letters home, while brief, did provide his parents with the names of his friends. Ed Nott died during the Voldemort's first war. Harry and Luna killed Nott's son and grandson (Harry's former classmate) in the skirmishes leading up to the final fight between Harry and Voldemort.

James found the group to be subtly different from the Slytherin he attended school with. Although James could sense a level of one-upmanship he was used to among Slytherins, he did not feel this group possessed the twisted, naked ambition of the later generation. This group seemed to be normal eleven year-olds. Yes, they had many of the Pureblood attitudes James hated, but they lacked the fanaticism in their eyes. It gave James hope.

One item James did note was the way the young ladies of Slytherin seemed to watch Tom. James bet that Tom did not realize how they took their cue from him. They seemed to have adopted Tom as their pet project. James chuckled to himself as he realized this was going to be a lot of fun to watch.

The one down note of the visit occurred when three additional First year boys entered the common room. The largest boy sneered at James. Then he turned his glare at Tom.

“Did you Daddy need to come tuck you in?”

Tom answered in a level voice. “Dolohov, we were having a pleasant visit. Just leave.”

“Did the Head of House give his approval? I think not. I am going to tell the prefects.” Dolohov smirked in triumph.

Tom turned to his father in defeat, however Tom saw the glint in his son’s eyes. A voice in James’s head cried, “Look out!”

Tom hissed, Sorry, Dad. I should have checked in. Dolohov is a real prat, but the prefects support him.

James raised an eyebrow and replied, Be careful. All three of them became Death Eaters. Apparently they went down that path merrily on their own. Changing topics James asked, Why are we hissing at each other?

Tom smirked and glanced at the three boys. It is really freaking them out. James laughed out loud at this causing the boys to look really nervous.

Are you going to tell them who you are descended from?

Tom shrugged, Eventually, but not yet. I want to look into Slytherin’s history a bit first.

Talk to me before you do anything? James requested. And do not try to go into the Chamber of Secrets without me!

Tom smiled and nodded his agreement. Tom had heard stories about Harry’s adventures in the Chamber of Secrets several times and he really wanted to see it for himself.

James turned to Ed Nott and the Slytherin girls and said, “It was nice meeting all of you. Hopefully you can visit us at our home in

Hogsmeade during your time here.” James noticed that all of the Slytherins in the common room except Tom wore identical shocked expressions over the parseltongue conversation.

After their goodbyes, James walked out of the Slytherin common room. As the portal closed, he heard Tom voice saying, “See, I told you everyone can speak parseltongue.” James snickered to himself walking down the hall.

He wondered what his father, Sirius and Remus would think about him raising the one-time Tom Marvolo Riddle and Lord Voldemort to become a Marauder. Walking down the hall, James wondered idly what Tom’s animagus form would take.

12:00 MoM Executive Conference Room

James sat unobtrusively against the wall in the Minister of Magic’s conference room. Wearing his Unspeakable robes, James seemed to blend into his surroundings. Any non-Unspeakable looking in his hood at James’s face would see only darkness, his voice also changed to be unidentifiable, male or female. James’s former teammate Charlie sat next to him without speaking.

James reflected on the changes in Charlie since the mission to Dachau. She seemed much more focused on her work, but James worried she had become too brittle. James had seen it in the war against Voldemort. The LeStrange brothers and some low level Death Eaters captured Hermione during a trip to Hogsmeade. Harry and Ron tracked them down quickly using Harry’s wolf animagus form. Although she was only held for an hour, the LeStrange’s had already abused her significantly. Harry and Ron recovered her and she seemed to bounce back. However the next major skirmish with the Death Eaters caused her to breakdown in the middle of the fight. Ron attempted to rescue her with Neville covering them. Unfortunately, Voldemort arrived at the battle, forcing the Order members back. Captured, Ron and Hermione were held two weeks until the Harry’s final battle with Voldemort. James saw the same brittleness in Charlie now.

Keeping his concerns to himself, James watched as the civilian ministry leaders filed into the room. Mr. Able sat next to the head of

Magical Law Enforcement. The two men carried on a whispered conversation. Mr. Able was the public face of the DoM. A metamorphamagus, Mr. Able was able to protect his identity while seeming to appear open with his colleagues. Mr. Johnston, the MLE Head, seemed a no-nonsense Barty Crouch type with no sense of humor.

The Minister wandered in with a pair of cronies tagging along. Minister Nott seemed intelligent and competent, unlike the other Ministers of Magic Harry had dealt with. Unfortunately, James found him to be as arrogant as a Malfoy. Nott felt the Ministry was his inheritance and treated many of the employees as family servants. From Tom's comments, James knew Edward Nott was being groomed by his father to take over his "inheritance" one day.

Thoughts of Tom made James smile a bit. James enjoyed meeting Tom's friends. They seemed like a good group. Their hissed conversation would definitely stir things up in Slytherin House.

Minister Nott sat at the head of the table and huffed, "Okay, let get this meeting started." The various department heads started presenting the status of their departments. The head of the Department of International Cooperation was the last to present.

The old witch named Theodora Rhys leaned forward. "We have received indications that the German Ministry is not following the guidelines established in our September accord. Grindelwald continues to prepare and work with the Muggle government. We have found indications of German magical and Muggle agents in France, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The German Muggle government already holds Austria and the Sudetenland."

Nott turned a bit red in the face. "Do you think he intends to follow through with his plans? Why would he lie to me?" The last was said as almost a whine.

Mr. Able shrugged, "Grindelwald wants power. He thinks we have something that will give it to him. He has agents in London, Dover, Edinburgh, and Hogsmeade that we know of right now."

The department head of Sports and Games asked, "Why does he have people in Hogsmeade?"

Mr. Able replied, "Aside from the DoM, Hogwarts represents the highest concentration of magical energy and knowledge in the British Isles."

Mr. Johnston added, "The Unspeakables have been very helpful in passing their information on to my department. The Aurors identified a new immigrant to Hogsmeade with ties to the German Ministry."

A burly wizard from the Department of Finance asked, "Do we need to send Aurors or Unspeakables to protect Hogwarts?"

The DMLE head shook his head, "The Unspeakables are not legally allowed to operate within Britain. I have some resources stationed in the village but the school's wards will keep any intruder out long enough to allow my men to respond."

James found himself standing in front of his chair. He did not remember standing. Everyone in the room turned to look at him.

Mr. Able asked, "Do you have something to add?"

"Yes," James replied, "The Hogwarts wards prevent larger groups with malicious intent from entering the grounds. Small groups of average magical power can walk through the wards."

"Of average power?"

James nodded, "We can't measure it exactly but assume Professor Dumbledore as the top end of the measure. The wards would block the entrance of a Dark wizard with his level of power. How many normal witches or wizards would it take to match Professor Dumbledore in raw magical power?" James didn't mention that an army of squibs armed with muggle weapons could march through the wards whatever their intent.

Several of the department heads looked shocked about the gap in the wards protections. One asked, "How do you know this?"

"I made a study of wards and their limitations. Hogwarts maintains one of the strongest sets of wards in the world. I included it in my study," James answered with a small shrug. Then he sat down.

The meeting continued with a discussion of assigning Aurors to the school grounds. The Minister closed the discussion with the promise to talk to Headmaster Dippet. Most of the department heads seemed to accept this proposal.

The Minister gestured to Mr. Able and said, "Mr. Able would like to present one final topic."

"With me today is the new team lead of our primary operations team. Unspeakable Charlie was the senior returning member of the team sent into Germany to recover our Aurors. For the last two years, Charlie has been rebuilding the team. His team recently returned from a reconnaissance mission to Dumstrang."

Charlie stood up. "Thank you Mr. Able. My team found a large number of additional structures added to the school's grounds. We were unable to get too close however they appeared to be a training center for a large number of magical troops. The spells we saw used emphasized offensive power. They did a large amount of power but seemed to require little skill or casting time in their use."

The Minister frowned, "What does that mean?"

Mr. Able answered, "The Dark Lord is rapidly expanding his Dark Army. The new forces consist of quickly trained, disposable troops specialized on attacking targets. The Muggle term for them would be 'cannon-fodder'. We saw some signs of this during their interference in the Spanish Civil War. It appears that was a trial run. We believe Britain is his true target."

A murmur of unease rippled through the room. The Goblin Liaison asked, "Do you think it will come to that?"

Able nodded, "Our analysis indicates the Muggles will be at war within a year. I believe they plan to use that conflict to cover a magical one. We have to start preparing our defenses now." He gestured at James. "This is the Count. He is one of our best. I would

like to set up a Joint Planning Group of multiple departments with the Count as the overall commander. With his background, he is uniquely suited to provide leadership to the group.”

James liked the way Able told them about the analysis results. Most of the “analysis” came from James talking about his knowledge of the Muggle Second World War. Although he had not studied it since his pre-Hogwarts schooling, James was able to provide certain information like the invasion of Poland signaled the start of the war for Britain and it occurred in September or October of 1939.

James did not want this role. It would detract from his time with his family and the Foundation. Able and Cain (the true Head of the Unspeakables) pushed James into accepting their nomination. James was their only resource with real experience in a magical war. Cain pointed out that combined with James’s ‘future’ knowledge he was by far the best candidate for the position.

Able pointed out, “It is a desk job. You will be safe.”

“I am not as concerned about my safety,” James growled. “I don’t like sending other people out into harms way.”

Cain grunted, “I said the same thing when I got forced to become the Head Unspeakable. Deal with it. I had to.”

James shook his head at the memory. The discussion had carried on for several more minutes while James stood silent. James did not like the direction the arguments were going. He stepped forward towards the table.

“Excuse me. Mr. Able is not talking about preparing to invade anyone. Nor break any of our laws. We are talking about preparing our forces to protect our citizens. The Unspeakables will fight all efforts to invade. Once they reach English soil, we are legally barred from action. It will be the Aurors’ job. They are trained to deal with criminals, not organized troops. Honestly, only the Unspeakable mission teams are trained to fight as units.”

James looked at the incredulous faces. He started, “In addition, the Muggle war will impact us...”

The Department of Finance head interrupted him. "Why would the Muggle war affect us? Never has before!"

"Are you aware of the advances in Muggle aircraft?" James asked. "The Germans are well ahead of everyone else in using aircraft to drop bombs. A bomb won't care about Diagon Alley or St. Mungo's Muggle repelling charms, or hidden, unplottable wizard houses. A couple bombs can destroy an entire block."

One pureblood asked, "What is a bomb?"

James withheld a snort. "Imagine a wizard on a broom flying along casting Reducto curses. Each curse would be ten times its normal strength."

"I don't believe it!" the pureblood scoffed.

"Belief is not necessary. It is true. Only one magical site in England is protected from Muggle bombs."

"Where is that?"

James shrugged, "The Phoenix Foundation facility emplaced the ward two months ago. Nicely done too. The neutralize the explosives and divert the bomb case into the Thames. The Muggles will never notice."

"How do you know that?"

They could hear the grin in James's disguised voice as he answered, "Again, I like to study wards."

DMLE asked, "Who developed the wards?"

"The Foundation's founder, Mr. Evans, worked with Mr. Potter and Professor Dumbledore on the wards. It was their 'summer project'."

The Minister seemed to perk up a bit at that news. "Really? My son is friends with his son at Hogwarts. Most of his brief letters deal with their time together. What do we know about Mr. Evans? I don't recognize the family name."

Mr. Johnston answered, "We did do an investigation of the Phoenix Foundation at your office's request when they first opened. We don't know much about Mr. Evans's past but the Foundation is on the straight side. My nephew attends the primary day school and loves it. They don't teach spells but they do cover magical theory as well as the muggle sciences. I know he consults with Headmaster Dippet. He also beat Malfoy's heir in a duel at Hogwarts a couple years ago. He taught some training classes after that for my Aurors. They said he is very good."

"What is his family background?" the minister asked.

"He is reported to be a Half-blood. His wife was an Underhill. His mother-in-law loudly stated her disapproval of the marriage." Johnston looked uncomfortable. "Normally the Aurors don't look into that but the woman insisted on telling us about it when we questioned her."

James quietly fumed at the discussion. Able seemed to realize they were on dangerous ground. He cleared his throat to bring the attention back to him.

"We are getting a bit off-topic. I believe that Mr. Evans may be willing to share his ward design with us."

James was furiously thinking, 'Over my dead body! Stupid Pureblood bigot!'

The Minister waved the comment away. "Very well. Count, I will provisionally place you in charge of the Planning Group. Develop your plans, but don't implement anything until I get approval from the Wizengamot."

James bowed his agreement because he still did not trust his temper.

The meeting dispersed with James following Able and Charlie down to Cain's office. Cain monitored the meetings through charms on Abel. James suspected they could communicate in some way during the meetings.

When they walked into the office, there were four cups of tea around the table. Next to one was a shot of firewhiskey.

Cain gestured at the table. "Please be seated. Count your seat is over there." He indicated the seat with the shot glass.

James drank the shot. "Thanks, Cain. I needed that."

"Good, now let's get down to business..."

7 November 1938

A week later, James found himself again walking the halls of Hogwarts. This time he wore his Unspeakable robes with the obscuration charms in place. Two Aurors and a witch from the Ministers office accompanied James on this visit.

The two Aurors were Artimus Franklin and 'Mad-Eye' Moody. Franklin was the senior Auror James met with Moody at the orphanage. Both were rescued from Dachau by the team including James, although neither of them knew about 'the Count's' involvement. DMLE Head Johnston named each of them to the Planning Group.

The witch was Irma Black. Madam Black saw herself as the Minister's watchdog on the Planning Group. James remembered seeing her name on the Black Family Tree at Grimmauld Place. If he remembered correctly, this witch was the mother of Walburga Black of the infamous Permanent Sticking Charm portrait. That made her Sirius's grandmother. After only a week, James completely understood where Walburga got her charm and why Sirius ran away.

Irma Black started by trying to interrogate James on his blood. Although his face was obscured, James gave her his best Voldemort impression. After years of dealing with Voldemort and Dumbledore, James discovered how to allow his magic to flare giving him an aura of his choosing. The Dumbledore of his time projected the grandfatherly trust and amusement.. Voldemort projected the promise of death and pain. Madam Black backed off.

James found it ironic that the Dark wizarding families of Britain sided with the Ministry and the Light families against the current Dark Lord.

This seemed to be due to two primary causes. The first reason was Grindelwald did not support their Pureblood agenda. Grindelwald preferred competence to heritage. (The only thing James found himself agreeing with.) The second reason tied to the first. If victorious, Grindelwald would replace the current society elite with his own followers.

The students were between classes as the foursome walked into the Entrance Hall of Hogwarts. The students paused to observe the newcomers. The pause became protracted as they recognized the robes of an Unspeakable. The students separated to allow James to continue on his way to the Headmaster's office.

Realizing he was the center of attention caused James to grin within his hood. He glided to a stop and seemed to glare out at the staring students. Then he made a sudden movement and shouted, "BOO!"

Two dozen students screamed and fled the room. James fought to hold in his laughter. Madam Black glared at him while the Aurors shook their heads in disapproval.

James glanced at the remaining ten students in the room. Each held a wand in their hand. James nodded approvingly and said, "I will speak to the Headmaster about awarding each of you House points for not giving in to panic." Then he continued on his way.

A short time later, James, the Aurors and Madam Black were seated in the Headmaster's office. Joining the Headmaster were Professors Dumbledore and Merrythought. Professor Dumbledore attended as the Deputy Headmaster and resident expert on the school wards. Professor Merrythought was the long running DADA professor and defense expert.

After greeting his guests, Professor Dippet asked them to explain why they requested this meeting. James explained the concern over Hogwarts being the focus of possible activity of the Dark Lord's forces.

The Headmaster attempted to set their concerns aside. "Hogwarts is the safest place on Earth. No attacking force has ever breached our wards. You can set your concerns aside."

"I never talked about a large force moving against the school, Headmaster. What about a small group of two or three Dark wizards with a specific target in mind?"

"The wards will protect us in that case also," he replied.

James looked at Professor Dumbledore and simply asked, "Professor?"

Dumbledore rubbed his beard in a moment's consideration. "It may be possible I suppose, if they are not of significant power. However, they would not be able to damage the school in any significant way at their strength."

Moody answered, "Maybe not the school, but what about individual students or an other objective? Would the wards stop them from that?"

Dumbledore eyed James, "Where did you learn about this weakness in our wards?"

James ignored the question and asked instead, "Grindelwald was a student here, a top student. Could there be some information, object or person on the grounds he would be interested in?"

Professor Dippet nodded reluctantly. "I was the new Charms professor when Albert attended the school. Albus here was in the same year. I suppose there could be something..."

Madam Black huffed, "I remind you the Minister's only son is a student here, along with children of half the Wizengamot and all of the families that count! You must protect the children!"

Professor Merrythought spoke for the first time. "What do you propose?" the witch asked.

"Nothing definite at this point," James answered. "Nothing indicates it is something that will occur in the near future. Our Planning Group is looking at many issues of defending magical Britain. Hogwarts is an important component of that. I would not make a suggestion until you had been able to think the problem through first."

The Headmaster nodded his thanks. "I appreciate both your concern and your courtesy. We will put some thought into your concerns."

James handed each of the professors a galleon. Before they could ask, James said, "I am not often reachable at the Ministry. If you hold the coin and call out 'The Count', I will floo you. If you say 'Emergency' I will come to you immediately."

Merrythought commented, "Ingenious! Is this DoM issue?"

James smiled sadly in his hood. "No, it was developed by a witch I went to school with. She came up with the first version that simply called the holder to a meeting in our Fifth year. It is also charmed so you won't accidentally spend it."

Professor Dippet marveled at the coin. "A Fifth year did this? This is well beyond NEWT level charm work. She must have been a genius!"

"The smartest witch of her generation. Even her detractors agreed on that point."

Madam Black commented, "Who was she? She must have been from one of the noble families."

"No, she was Muggle-born. Not only was she a genius but she was one of the strongest magic users I have ever met. She gave her life to stop a Dark Lord of extraordinary power. She is one of the standards I use in judging my own actions. She was often our group's conscious in school. I still hear her voice when I feel guilty of something."

The Aurors and the professors looked surprised at both the amount of information an Unspeakable had given on himself and the depth of sincerity in his obscured voice. Irma Black looked torn between sneering at a Mudblood and curiosity of someone an Unspeakable considered a paragon of witches.

The meeting adjourned with promises to meet together within a month. Professor Dumbledore offered to escort their guests out of the castle. James mentioned the points as they walked out of the Headmaster's office. Dumbledore chuckled and agreed to present the individuals points during dinner that night.

Noticing the Aurors and Madam Black had walked ahead and out of earshot, Professor Dumbledore placed his hand on James arm and stopped him. "James, do you know something is going to happen?"

James sighed and allowed the Obscuration Charm to fade. "I hate it when you do that!"

The professor's eyes twinkled as he waited for an answer.

"I honestly don't know. A lot was hushed up and we were too concerned with another Dark Lord to worry about it much. And I may have altered history too much already. I am just basing this on my own experience and instinct. I believe there is a danger, Albus."

"I will keep your secret but I will let the Headmaster know we need to take this warning seriously." Then he paused, "And I will tell young Mr. Evans that you said hello."

James smiled and reactivated his Charm. "Thank you professor."

A/N: Sorry about the delay. I really wanted to post more over the last two weeks but I just ran into too many real life issues.

Chapter 13 – Winds of War

June 1, 1939

“Albus, Thomas, I am glad you could join us,” James greeted the new arrivals. James was seated at his kitchen table with a member of the DoM research department and his wife.

Dumbledore smiled, “The students have now left and I have found the halls to be quite silent already. I am happy to visit.”

“I understand that Tom gave you a hard time this morning,” Sarah grinned.

“He made an excellent point,” Albus pointed out. “Going to Hogsmeade Station to take the train to London so he can floo home to Hogsmeade. How did you know, my dear?”

“The twins and I ran into the students on their way to the station. I gave Tom a picnic lunch for the train and took his trunk. He complained to me then,” the blond woman answered.

James looked sternly at his wife. “Did you embarrass Tom in front of his friends?”

Sarah smacked him on the back of the head. “This coming from the man who turned Tom into a wolf cub and sent biscuits that turned all the First year Slytherins hair blue!”

The rest of the table laughed at the smirk James wore on his face at his wife’s retort. James took her hand and kissed it. Then, still holding her hand, he turned back to his guests.

“Thank you for coming today, all of you.” James said with a serious expression. “You are all aware of how I came to be in this time. When I arrived, I never had any intention of staying. My plan was to complete my mission and spend the rest of my time in obscurity until I went home.” James glanced at Sarah. “I have found the home I was looking for here already. I am looking for your help in separating myself from the Time Turner so I may remain in this time.”

The Unspeakable spoke first. "Mr. Able directed me to assist you in this effort. Please call me Kay. I am unsure why the Department of Mysteries is involved, but you already have my assistance. I understand why you have asked Professor Dumbledore to become involved, but I am unsure about Mr. Potter's involvement."

"This effort is sealed to this room, Kay. Only Mr. Able is privy to the discussion. Understood?" James asked.

The Unspeakable started to object until she noticed the position of James's free hand on the table. The casual position of the hand and fingers seemed completely natural. However, she recognized it as a DoM recognition signal. Understanding of the situation came to Kay. She nodded her acceptance of both James's communications.

"I won't go into details today, Kay. I will say that Thomas and his wife are the closest things I have to family in this time except for my own wife and children. Thomas was the first person I told about myself. He encouraged me to discuss it with Albus. I told him early last autumn."

"I called you here today to give you some details about how I came here. I will not discuss why I came here. No one here needs to know." James then proceeded to explain everything he knew about the Time Turner and its 10-12 year recharge period. He concluded with, "I arrived here in June of '34. That leaves me at least five years to discover a way to stop the return process."

"The person who sent you back said the Time Turner itself would only exist astrally as it recharges?" Kay asked.

"Yes, that is what I was told. I haven't seen it since it was activated so I have to believe he was telling me the truth." James had decided not to mention just who had sent him back.

Kay looked troubled. "To recharge it and keep it astral, he must have tied it to your magical core. Your own magic is its recharge source. Do you feel magically weaker?"

"My first couple of days were rough," James replied. "I haven't had a problem since."

“James is the strongest wizard I have ever met,” Sarah commented. “He casually uses magic without the effort most of us use. It reminds me of Albus from when I was in school.”

The Unspeakable looked at James with new speculation in her eyes.

“Can we break the tie between James’s core and the Time Turner?” Thomas asked.

Albus rubbed his head in absent thought. “I am not sure. There could be several problems that could occur in trying to disrupt the link.” He thought for a moment longer. “But we shall have to try. I will start researching this summer in the Hogwarts library. Also Professor Dippet may have some materials in the Headmaster’s Library.”

“The Headmaster’s Library?” Sarah asked.

“Each Headmaster and many long term professors traditionally leave their rare collections to the school. Only those materials too sensitive even for the Restricted Section are kept in the Headmaster’s Library adjacent to the Headmaster’s office. Only the Headmaster and the Deputy Headmaster may enter uninvited.”

‘Blood hell!’ Harry thought with a snort, ‘Good thing Hermione never heard about that. It must not be in *Hogwarts: A History*.’ The Unspeakable looked as if this was news to her also. Catching the look in her eye, James thought she looked almost as curious as Hermione would have. ‘Must have been a Ravenclaw.’

The sound of the two-year-old twins waking up from their nap brought the meeting to a close. Kay took her leave first. She told James she would research the DoM archives for information on the development of the Time Turners and their usage. Then Albus left to make his way up to the school after promising to meet James and Thomas for their weekly visit to the Three Broomsticks.

Thomas asked to stay to see his great-grandchildren. “It is strange to meet my great-grandchildren before my son is born.”

James nodded, "I only hope I haven't changed history too much. Would he be the same man as in my past? Would he still marry Mum and have me? It is giving me a headache just thinking about it."

Sarah came into the kitchen with her giggling children floating along behind her. They seemed to be having a wonderful time. James and Thomas grinned. From the kids' reactions, it seemed the Potter love of flying lived on!

July 5, 1939

Tom cruised along on his broom making a run at the goal rings with a Quaffle under his arm. Ed Nott moved to block him in the goal. Tom faked a pump and threw the ball towards the top left portion of the ring. The large ball caught the rim and deflected through the goal.

"Goal!" Tom yelled.

"Lucky shot!" Nott replied.

"It is the points that count!" Tom shot back.

It was four weeks into the summer break. Tom and Nott decided to work on their Quidditch skills. Tom wanted to play Chaser on the Slytherin team. One Chaser left school this year. The other two would be Seventh years this year. He would have a good chance of getting one of the open positions in the next two years. Nott wanted to play Goalie. The current Goalie was a new Sixth year. Nott, in pure Slytherin fashion, befriended the boy in an effort to become his heir apparent. Smithers knew why Nott courted him and seemed impressed with the younger Slytherin rather than offended.

Tom's Hogsmeade house had become the unofficial headquarters for the new Second year Slytherins. Located on the edge of the village, the students enjoyed roving the village and flying on their brooms. Because the town was the only purely magical village in Britain, they were free to use magical devices or talk about magic wherever they wanted.

Tom, Mary and Edward particularly enjoyed using the Dueling Room at the Evan's house. The house wards prevented the Ministry from

detecting the underage use of magic. Edward claimed that the dueling automatons were much faster and agile than the ones at Nott Manor. James would occasionally join them to teach basic dueling technique and some of the more entertaining dueling tricks and hexes.

Xurana and Mary spent a good part of the summer sighing over James. Tom thought it was annoying. His mum laughed until tears ran in her eyes when he complained about it to her.

“Are you jealous, Tom?” she asked.

Tom got a disgusted look on his face. “No! It is just weird. They usually seem so sensible. It is like their brains dribbled out. They have this gobsmailed look on their faces whenever Dad comes by.”

To Tom’s disbelief, this caused her to laugh again even harder. When Sarah regained her ability to talk, she hugged Tom and said, “I think you will understand soon enough.” Then she giggled.

Tom walked off with a scowl and grumbled to himself.

After a while on the pitch, the boys settled under a shady tree to rest. Settling into a comfortable spot, Tom noticed that his only real male Hogwarts friend looked uncomfortable.

“What’s up, Nott?”

The dark-haired boy grimaced. “Tom, where are you and your family from?”

Tom blinked. That was not a question he expected. “I am an orphan. I lived in London until I was six.”

Nott still pressed. “Where is your father from?”

“What is with the questions about Dad?”

Nott looked down and studied a blade of grass in his hand. “I heard my father and some of his friends talking last night. They talked about your father.”

“Was it bad?” Tom asked.

Nott shrugged, “They seemed angry about something to do with his Foundation. I heard one suggest he might have been sent here by Grindelward as an agent.”

Tom snickered. “I know that is not true. Believe me, Dad hates the Dark Arts. He spent a long time fighting another Dark Lord before he moved here.”

Nott shrugged without looking up, “Mmm, my father told me to pay attention to anything I can learn here and let him know what I find.”

Tom looked curiously at his friend. “Why are you telling me this?”

“A couple reasons, I guess. You are the first real friend I ever had. Growing up it was just my Father’s “acceptable” playmates, like Dolohov. But there is something about you and your father. It is like you two know a secret no one else does. I think you have the potential to become the greatest wizard in our generation.”

Thinking about the actions of the ‘other’ Tom Riddle from Dad’s original timeline, Tom gave an uncomfortable shrug.

“I didn’t tell him you are both Parseltongues,” Nott added.

“Why not?”

Now it was the other boy’s chance to shrug uncomfortably. “It doesn’t seem like it should be any of his business.” Nott paused and looked at his friend. “I did some research last year. You are one of six known pasetongues since Slytherin himself. Your father is also one of the six. One-third of the wizards in a thousand years that can speak to serpents live in this house. There is something important here.”

Tom felt a bit nervous at Nott’s observation. He decided to share some of the truth. “There have been more. Everyone in my birth family has the talent. They were never public about it.”

Nott’s eyes grew large. A family of parseltongues? “Are they still alive?”

“No, well, I had a biological uncle, but he died in a Muggle jail,” Tom answered.

Tom thought back to his father telling him the news. Not long after James and Tom visited the Gaunt and Riddle households, Morfin Gaunt decided to pay the Riddles a visit. The unstable wizard was drunk on firewhiskey when he appeared in the village. Morfin started a fight with several young men in the village. The Bobbies tossed the drunk into a cell. His wand was taken and used as kindling in the police station fireplace before the wizard sobered up. The DMLE decided to allow the outcast wizard to remain in Muggle custody since no magic was used in the altercation. The last Gaunt died as the result of injuries received in prison during a mini-riot he started with other inmates.

“I am sorry to hear that,” Nott started.

Tom interrupted him, “Don’t be sorry. He treated my mother horribly. My grandfather did too. I hope they both rot in Hell!” he snarled.

Nott looked shocked at the hatred revealed in Tom’s comment.

After a moment, Tom’s face cleared up and he waved his comment away. “So, what are you going to tell your father?”

“I’ve told him a bit about my time here.” He waved in the direction of the pitch. “I told him about playing Quidditch, meeting your family, stuff like that. I didn’t tell him we can use magic in the Dueling Room.” Nott paused. “I know there is more, Tom, stuff you aren’t telling me.”

Tom nodded. “Yes, there is. I would like to tell you but some of it is not mine to tell. It is not that I don’t trust you.”

Nott grinned at him. “I understand. I am Slytherin after all. I will figure it out eventually.”

Tom threw a blade of grass at his friend and they both laughed. The conversation turned to other topics. Tom reminded himself to talk to his father later.

August 6, 1939

“Good afternoon, Minister.”

“Good afternoon, Count. Thank you for agreeing to meet on a Sunday afternoon. My time has been very busy.”

James sat in the offered chair. “I am sure it is, Minister. What can I help you with today?”

The Minister moved to sit behind his desk. “I have several concerns. The suggestions coming out of your Planning Group seem rather costly. Are you really so sure that war is unavoidable?”

James sighed to himself. It seemed all Ministers were alike. “Minister Nott, I believe the war will start shortly. The Muggle German army has reached a high level of preparedness. One doesn’t train as intensely as they have with out the plan to use it.” James smiled within his hood. “The bureaucrats would scream about the cost if it was normal training.”

Minister Nott barked a laugh. “That’s the truth. They act like I am spending their money every time we meet. You may be right.”

“Based on reports we have received, Grindelwald plans to use the Muggle war to cover his plans to conquer wizarding Europe. Hitler is fascinated with magic. Grindelwald did some tricks and brought in a fake Seer. Hitler bought it all.”

Minister Nott wrung his hands in frustration. “I wanted peace on my watch, not a damn bloody war!”

“No sane man wants a war, sir. But whether we want it or not, it is coming. Gindelwald seeks power and the freedom to perform the Darkest magic. Our options are to fight him or let him unleash Hell on Earth. I agree with the American president Theodore Roosevelt when he said, ‘Wars are, of course, as a rule to be avoided; but they are far better than certain kinds of peace’.”

The Minister leaned back in his chair. “I agree, Count. I just don’t understand why they would do this.”

James just sat silently for a moment. Then he said quietly, "Be happy you have never been forced to deal with these types of people personally. I was never given a choice."

The minister stared at James for a moment. "Have you completed your defense plans for the Ministry and Hogwarts?"

"The Ministry is done. The wards were reworked and rekeyed for the first time in a hundred years. Grindelwald did a study on them during his Seventh year and may have found a weakness."

"And Hogwarts? My son is there and I am concerned they may make it a bigger target."

James frown slightly. "The school's wards are generally very effective. However making them too restrictive interferes with the school's operation. We are placing an Auror station in Hogsmeade with a direct Floo connection to the school."

"Dippet and the Board of Governors have agree to this?" the minister asked.

"Only the Headmaster's permission was needed for the Floo connection. The Aurors are posted off the school grounds. I would like to set up some roving guards around the castle at night. The prefects might be sufficient to catch students sneaking snogging sessions, but not for real security."

The minister smiled slightly at James's comment, "I suspect you are right. I assume the Governors will have to agree to the night guards?" James nodded. "I will talk to Sirius Black. He is a family friend and chairs the Board."

James felt a twinge at the reminder of "his" Sirius. "Madam Irma Back was included in our initial discussions with the Headmaster. But I would thank you for adding your influence, Minister."

The Minister smiled, "Knowing Irma, she has already told her brother-in-law what he needs to do. Witch scares me." Then he frowned slightly. "I have a concern in Hogsmeade. My son has been spending most of his summer at his friend's house in the village. The family

simply appeared with no history. The man, James Evans, arrived and started a charity organization. He runs it from the background letting a Pureblood witch run it. My Aurors can find no information aside from what he publicly released.”

James grinned in his hood. “We are aware of Mr. Evans.”

The minister’s eyes widened slightly. “You are? What do you know?”

“Your son is safe at the Evans house. In fact, it may be the safest place in Hogsmeade. Mr. Evans is an excellent dueler and takes security very seriously. He did all his own wards. I can safely say he is on the Light side.”

The minister grimaced slightly. “The Aurors couldn’t even get a Listening Charm through the wards. Told me it would take a Gringott’s Curse Breaker three days to crash the wards. I wanted information, not an assault.”

James frowned, “Mr. Evans takes his privacy very seriously. He is also very protective of everyone he considers family. I think he would be a dangerous wizard to antagonize.” James paused a moment, “He often meets with Thomas Potter and Professor Dumbledore at the Three Broomsticks. They seem close.”

“Dumbledore and Potter, eh? Interesting friends. Not supporters of mine but definitely not supporters of Grindelwald. Okay, I will accept he is not a security threat. I will have to arrange to meet with him to access where he stands otherwise.” The minister thought for a moment. “Thank you again for coming, Count. Enjoy the rest of your Sunday.” James nodded his head and walked out of the office.

The undertones of the comments angered James. The minister seemed more interested in deciding if association with the Evans family was damaging to his political life than his son’s well being. Minister Nott was smarter and smoother than Fudge, but still of the same breed.

August 31, 1939

James was at his desk in the Ministry late on a Thursday night. Tom was leaving for his Second year at Hogwarts tomorrow. James planned to take the morning off to take his son to the train.

James laughingly offered to allow Tom to walk up to the school and skip the train. Tom declined saying, "I want to be with my friends."

James sat in his office in a hidden part of the DoM. The Department was divided into separate security sections. James's office area was hidden behind an illusionary wall that felt real unless you knew it was really an illusion. The Unspeakables responsible for the monitoring of intelligence and operations in Gindelwald controlled parts of Europe sat outside James's office. The office was quiet. Only James and the night monitor were still in the office.

The DoM area holding the prophecies and the veil was several halls away. James avoided it as much as possible. After joining the Unspeakables, James learned a great deal about the security for the Department. It amazed him that Harry and his friends made it to that area. It should have been obvious it was an ambush. The Death Eaters opened a path directly to the prophecy. Harry should have realized the Unspeakables would have strong protections on their department.

James looked up suddenly when a red flashing light started in the office area. He heard the duty monitor let out a yelp of surprise. James wandlessly summoned his battle robes and walked out of his office.

The silent red alarm activated in the DoM and the DMLE when the outer Ministry wards were breached. The wards occurred in three stages. The outer wards covered the perimeter of the Ministry. During the day, the wards remained passive. Only a large amount of magical energy directed at the Ministry would be deflected. At night, the wards prevented access to anyone without a Ministry pass or keyed to the wards.

The second layer of wards prevented unauthorized wizards from entering key areas of the Ministry itself. The wards were specific to certain departments. For example, a visitor may receive a pass to the DMLE courtrooms, but the pass would not permit entry to the DoM.

The final ward layer was actually a lock down mode over the first ward layer. These wards would prevent any access or exit from the Ministry for a twelve hour period. These wards were meant to entrap attackers within the Ministry until outside forces could rally.

James pulled on his robes while approaching the monitors. The monitors were magical one-way mirrors emplaced in certain key areas of magical Britain. The monitors covered the Ministry entrance, the courtrooms, Diagon Alley, and the main street of Hogsmeade. The DoM kept the monitors secret. Since the Unspeakables were legally barred from operating in Britain, the monitors were technically illegal. So the information developed from them could never be used in a criminal prosecution. It also meant the DoM did not share the charms to create them with the DMLE.

"Sir," the young female Unspeakable named Marie St.Claire said as James approached, "we have at least five people making unauthorized entries into the Ministry. They hit the wards hard. I don't think they knew the night wards were in place."

"Are the Aurors reacting, Marie?"

"Sorry, Count. Most of them left on a call to Knockturn Alley. A couple of drunken werewolves are fighting some vampires."

Looking at the monitor, James absently asked, "They needed the whole duty watch for that?"

"Two went to stop the fight," came the answer. "The rest went to take bets, I think. Only Moody and their dispatcher are left."

"Contact the Aurors and let them know I am going to greet our guests. Tell Moody not to hex in my direction." Without waiting for a response, James walked quickly out of the room.

Three minutes later, James arrived in the Ministry atrium. Apparation and Portkey travel within the Ministry was impossible without massive amounts of magical energy. James had discovered another way of moving around. Placing a disillusionment charm on himself, James changed to his bat form and used the ventilation system to move

through the Ministry. (He enjoyed the many rumors in the Ministry that the Count really was a vampire.)

The atrium was unchanged from fifty years in the future. The same fountain with its ugly statue dominated the center of the room. Although Muggle technology would advance greatly in that time, the magical world stagnated, locked in the memories of glories past. James was willing to bet even the furniture in the waiting area was the same. A series of innate pillars lined the wall across from the elevators.

James found four black robed intruders attempting to bypass the wards to enter the DoM elevator. James turned back into his human form. Marie mentioned at least five intruders. That meant one was missing.

James silently cast a charm he developed with Sarah. It created a magical radar that mimicked the abilities of his bat animagus form except it bounced off of magical cores instead of solid objects. After sending a sounding through the atrium, only the same four wizards were in the area. Either Marie read the ward alarms wrong or one of the intruders had left the atrium area.

James pulled one of his wands. He cast a Silencing Spell on his feet and moved to a better place to attack the intruders. Once he was ready, James spoke, “**Stupify!**”

The first of the four wizards dropped bonelessly to the ground. James fired another stunner as the wizards dove for cover. Two of the wizards down, James moved to stun the remaining two.

A sudden crack sounded in the atrium. James felt a burning hammer smash into his left shoulder. James looked down in shock as blood started to stain his robes.

James moved quickly behind a column while holding his hand over the bloody mess that had been his shoulder. His left arm hung limply at his side. Several more cracks rang out and little clouds of dust rose where the bullets hit the nearby wall, as James slide down to a sitting position.

“Come out, foolish wizard. I will be merciful,” a German accented voice called out.

James placed his wand tip against his shoulder and whispered a basic healing charm. The charm would not repair the damage to the shoulder, but would seal the flesh part of the wound and numb the pain. Unless a more advanced form was used, scarring would occur but at least he wouldn't bleed to death.

“Come out wizard. I won't offer it again!”

James ignored it again. He placed his left arm against his chest. Straining to hold it there, James cast a low power Body Bind on the arm. It was enough to keep the arm immobilized against this chest and keep the shoulder from moving.

James pushed himself up against the column to regain his feet. He called out, “Very clever. Using a Muggle under an Invisibility Cloak is genius. I never saw it coming.”

“Flattery won't help you, wizard. I will...”

James didn't wait to hear what he would do. James fired two fast and powerful Reductos at the side of the fountain. The side exploded pouring water out onto the atrium floor. Getting back behind the column, James heard several voices yelling curses in German.

James saw the water approaching him and fired a Lightning Spell into the water. “**Electros!**”

Lightning flashed from the wand and hit the water. An ozone smell filled the room as the electricity ran through the water looking for ground. James heard scream of pain as he held the spell in place. A sudden instinct caused James to stop the spell and duck. A split second later, the green light of a Killing Curse passed over his head.

James closed his eyes and fired a powerful light flare. “**Luminos Maximus!**” The flash was blinding. Even through his closed eyelids it was bright. The Weasley twins developed the charm for use in their magical fireworks. He heard at least one scream of pain as the flare exploded.

James forced his eyes open and cast a Drying Charm on the floor. Then he moved to where the intruders had been hidden. Four bodies lay on the ground. Two were the initial Stunning victims. The other two had been caught in the electrified water. The water actually touched all four of them. Silently casting Stunners into all four of them (One can't be too careful!), James started looking for the fourth.

Since one of the bodies was holding a Muggle automatic pistol, James knew his remaining opponent as a wizard.

James heard swearing coming from the corner behind him. It was in English with a recognizable accent. In spite of everything, James could not repress a small smile. The debrief discussion would be fun.

James stepped carefully around the fountain. The fifth member of the Dark Army squad was slumped against the wall. James fired a stunner at him and the body did not even twitch. Keeping his distance, James cast a medical diagnostic spell Sarah taught him. The spell told him the wizard had died of a brain aneurism.

James placed his wand back into the sheath and walked over to the body. He had heard rumors of such a thing. Voldemort never used it because Azkaban was a revolving door for his Death Eaters. Grindelwald didn't even care that much. He set his operatives with suicide conditions. It took a master Legilmancer to plant the command, but it would cause instant death as soon as the operative considered capture as unavoidable.

Out of habit, James summoned the wands and the gun. James placed the pistol on safety and placed it into a pocket. He walked over to the sound of the swearing. Sitting against the wall with his hands in front of his eyes sat 'Mad-Eye' Moody.

"Tough night, Moody?"

"Bloody hell. I should have known it was you, Count. What in Merlin's name did you do to me?"

James smiled, "A magical flare. It is about 50 brighter than the sun. Great for clearing a room. It won't permanently damage the eyes, just hurts like hell."

Moody growled, "Did you at least capture them?"

"No, they had a suicide conditioning. The one who didn't die in the fight died without a spell touching him." James paused, "What happened in Auror Central that you were the only one left?"

"The idiots lost focus," Moody growled. "They wanted to see the fight in the Alley. Director Johnston will be handing them all their heads stuck on their wand tips."

James laughed, "Maybe we can get Johnston to give them to us for 'remedial training'."

"I like that idea, Count."

"I expected you to come out of the elevators." James commented.

"Took the stairs. No cover in the bloody elevator." The stairs only opened out for emergency evacuations. No one could open them from the Atrium side.

"Good point." James commented as the elevator doors opened. Six Aurors sprang out of the elevator with their wands drawn. "At least you remembered to take out your wands first!" James yelled.

The aftermath of the battle in the Ministry resulted in four dead Dark Army wizards, one dead SS officer and one dead British ministry worker. Alber Malgoup, the night reception desk guard was killed by the Killing Curse before he could activate the manual alarm. Only the alarms tied to the new wards gave a warning about the intruders.

The bodies of the intruders were transfigured into matchboxes and disposed of. Mr, Malgoup's body was removed for delivery to his family. The damage to the Atrium and the fountain were repaired quickly.

James and Moody sat through a debrief in one of the DMLE conference rooms. After James and Moody gave their accounts, Director Johnston turned on the Auror night supervisor (who went to Knockturn Alley too) asked a series of pointed questions. James

caught some grief for not taking any captives, but the Aurors recognized the conditioning made it unlikely in any event.

James asked a question that left the room wondering. "Why did they choose to attack tonight? The Ministry was unusually quiet tonight. I think the fight in the Alley was staged. I doubt they expected to get all the Aurors in the alley, but that is the only thing that makes sense."

The Aurors looked gobsmacked at the thought they had been led on a wild goose chase.

James stood up. "I am going to have my shoulder fixed." He fixed a glare at the Auror nightshift. "At 11 tomorrow morning, I expect a complete report on the incident tonight. Include their method of entry, the wards, our responses and what lessons we should learn from this."

Director Johnston added, "Something is going on girls and boys. We have to be ready. I want a brutally honest report, or I will hand you over to the Count Unspeakable for remedial training. Dismissed!"

When the room had cleared James looked at the Director. "The Count Unspeakable?"

Johnston grinned, "I thought it was catchy. Half of them are already convinced you are a vampire with that codename. Besides, did you see their faces when I threatened remedial training with you?" Johnston started laughing. After a minute, James joined him.

James Apparated from the Ministry to his house. The Aurors wanted James to go to St. Mungos for treatment. James knew his wife would prefer to do the work on him herself. He didn't look forward to it.

James walked quietly into his bedroom and gently woke his wife. "Sarah"

"Umm, are the kids up?" she asked.

"No, dear. I have a bit of a problem."

Her bright blue eyes opened, immediately awake. "What happened?"

“Muggle gunshot to the shoulder. I stopped the bleeding and immobilized it.”

Grabbing her wand she growled, “I am sure you made a mess of it.”

“Have I ever told you how sexy it is when you growl like that?”

Sarah pointed at the bed, “Sit down!”

“Yes, ma’am.” James sat in the indicated spot. He released the charm on his battle robes that prevented their removal.

Sarah loosened the battle robes to reach his shoulder. She cast a strong local numbing spell. Then she stopped the spell on James’s arm. Carefully and with minimal movement of his arm, Sarah removed the battle robes.

Sarah cast a spell on James’s shoulder. “You are lucky. It looks like it missed most of the bones. It did sever a couple of tendons which is why your arm won’t move.”

Sarah walked over to a locked wardrobe. Casting an opening charm, she pulled out three potions. She handed one to James. “This one will repair the tendons, muscle and bones. This one is a blood restorer. This one will prevent any internal or external scarring.”

“I know, I’ve used them before...”

She smacked him on the head. “Don’t talk back to your healer. Drink them, now.”

“Yes, dear.” James dutifully drank the potions.

“Now lay back on the bed.” Sarah banished the clothing and blood from James and tucked him under the covers. After clearing away the bloody robes and empty potions bottles, Sarah crawled into bed and curled up next to James.

Sarah gently kissed James. “I am so glad you made it back to me. I love you.”

“I love you too, dear.”

Careful of his shoulder, Sarah placed her head on James's other shoulder and held him tight. As he drifted off to sleep, James thought this was much better service than he ever received in the Hogwarts Hospital Wing.

September 1, 1939

The next morning James awoke to the sounds of pure chaos coming from the rest of the house. He could hear Tom yelling about getting his trunk packed for his return to Hogwarts. Katie and Michael were chanting something about their breakfast. Snuffles was howling his accompaniment. Sarah was telling all of them to quiet down and let James sleep.

James lay in bed with a smile on his face listening to the sounds of his family. It balanced the thoughts of what he had been forced to do the previous night. This was something truly worth defending.

James climbed out of bed, feeling only a mild stiffness in his shoulder. The wound from the previous night seemed completely healed. The soreness indicated the tendons and muscles still needed some healing time but on the whole the shoulder felt good.

Taking his shower, James thought about the inclusion of a Muggle soldier with the Dark Army wizards. The invisibility cloak hid the Muggle from James visual inspection and the lack of a magical core prevented his detection via a magical detector. It was a very clever trick on someone's part. Most magical defenses protected against other magic, not Muggle weapons. If the Muggle had a larger weapon James would have been killed without ever knowing he was under attack. Bullets were much harder to dodge than AK's.

Throwing on some casual Muggle clothes, James walked out to join his family. Cillie was making pancakes for the family (in honor of Tom's leaving for school) while Sarah tried to get the twins to eat.

“Good morning,” James said as he walked in. Receiving greetings from the speaking members in the family and giggles from Katie and Michael, James sat down for breakfast.

“All packed for school, Tom?” he asked.

“Yep. Can I take the Map this year?” Tom asked in an innocent tone.

Sarah mock yelled, “No! You don’t need such a thing! I have no idea why your father keeps it! You got enough detentions last year!”

James matched his son’s innocent expression, “But dear, it’s a family heirloom!”

Tom protested, “But I would get caught less with the Map!”

Sarah glared at her husband. “If you give him that map, no blueberries for you!”

James looked at Tom and shrugged, “Sorry, she has blackmail.”

“Curses, foiled again! Do you always have to ruin my plans?”

For a moment, James looked at his son and did not see Tom but Voldemort. How many times had Voldemort screamed that same question at Harry either in person or in visions? Now Tom said it not for Dark reasons, but for pranking material.

James laughed. Dumbledore had ultimately been proven right. Love did overcome Voldemort. James could see nothing of the once Dark Lord in this happy, thoughtful, funny boy in front of him. He had turned the Dark Lord into a Marauder! Sirius would be so proud. One thing was left to complete it.

James leaned over and whispered into Tom’s ear. “Next summer we will start your Animagus training!”

“James, what are you planning?” Sarah asked suspiciously.

James smiled at his wife. “Don’t worry. I will be keeping the Map in my possession.”

Sarah looked concerned. That promise was too straightforward. It meant he was up to something else. She decided to distract him from his evil pranking plans.

The twins ignored the whole conversation. They were happy on their own. The two year olds were capable of using normal speech but between the two of them they used their own form of twin speak. Although they were not identical twins, they spent all of their time together and formed a very close bond. James occasionally had vision of the Weasley twins finishing each other's sentences.

Sarah called everyone's attention to herself by clearing her throat. "Since Tom is leaving soon, I wanted to make one last announcement." She looked directly at James. "Mr. Evans, I have the honor of informing you that you will be a father again in eight months. According to the Healer I saw, it is twins again."

Tom let out a shout of excitement as James sat with a stunned expression on his face. Sarah smiled at the complete lack of comprehension on James's face. Finally, he shook himself and ran around the table to hug his wife.

"When...How?" he asked in shock.

Sarah giggled. "I assure you, you already know the answers to those questions."

Now, James started laughing with his wife and son. The twins laughed watching the three big people carrying on.

Tom laughed, "Congratulations, Dad. Keep it up and you can have your own Quidditch team!"

The Daily Prophet owl flew into the kitchen on its daily delivery. Sarah took the paper and paid the owl. She let out a sudden gasp as she read the headline.

'Looks like last night's attack made the paper already,' James thought.

Wordlessly, Sarah handed James the paper. He read:

MUGGLES AT WAR!!

Early this morning the Muggle German army smashed across the boarder into neighboring Poland. The attack came with no

warning. Reports of initial German victories started coming in at press time.

Further reports indicate the German Ministry of Magic wizards attacked the Polish Ministry in the early morning hours. Magical refugees have started Portkeying to the British Ministry international magical entry point shortly afterwards....

James set the paper down to look at his wife. The happy mood of minutes before completely lost. In a sad voice he said, "The war has started."

A/N: Some of you caught an error at the end of chapter 12. I edited out a scene with James telling Albus about himself, but left the conversation at the end of the chapter intact with Albus knowing about the time travel. James did not tell Albus he was an Unspeakable, the professor figured it out on his own. Congratulations to gallandro83 to be the first to point it out.

Chapter 14 – Fog of War

September 1, 1939

James sliced through the chaos that was the Ministry of Magic. Ministry workers and reporters filled the Atrium. The crowd parted nervously as James walked through in his Unspeakable robes. In his anger, James radiated magical energy. Combined with his robes, no one wanted to get in his way.

As James walked through the Atrium, he noticed that only a few signs of last night's battle remained. The walls and columns were back into a pristine condition. Only the fountain still showed signs of damage. The portion James banished to release the water was still missing.

'At least we didn't destroy the statue this time,' James thought as he walked into the waiting elevators.

After reading the news, James asked Sarah to take Tom to the Express. Tom looked disappointed but he understood why James had to go to the Ministry. Missing the planned morning in Diagon Alley and Tom's departure on the Express, irritated James. 'Couldn't they have waited one more day?' James fumed.

Five minutes later, James sat in a MoM briefing room. Seated with him were a dozen Ministry officials from the Department of Mysteries, Law Enforcement and International Cooperation. Abel and Charlie joined James as the DoM attendees.

Abel interrupted the chatter in the room. "Let's get started." Abel never spoke in a loud voice, but the room instantly quieted. "Witches and Wizards, we have a full plate today. Our world went mad last night. We had an assault by Grindelwald's forces last night on the Ministry. At the same time, the Muggle German army initiated their invasion of Poland."

Abel paused and glanced around the room. "I don't think anyone will believe that was a coincidence." Abel turned to James, "Count, please report what happened here last night."

James nodded and gave a full report on the events of the previous night. He spoke for ten minutes with no interruptions. When he finished the room was quiet for several seconds.

“What was their objective?” a DMLE official asked.

“Unknown,” James answered. “The lone survivor of the fight committed suicide before we could question him. Apparently they placed a mental trigger on him.”

Abel frowned, “The wards worked perfectly. The new wards gave us the warnings we needed. The response by the DMLE was severely lacking. Now that the war has come into the open, we will need to upgrade the active defensive measures on the Ministry.”

Charlie frowned in thought. “That is probably why they attacked last night. We would be on the alert once the war came into the open. The Count and I simulated an attack before we got the new wards up. Last night was their open window.”

Abel nodded, “Agreed. I will take that up with the Minister. I think he will agree to more active defensive measures after last night.”

“We will need to include Muggle defenses as well.”

A voice sneered, “What could Muggles give us?”

James turned to look at the source of the voice. It was a young man with platinum blonde hair and a permanent sneer. ‘Great,’ James thought, ‘a Malfoy.’ James recognized him as Abraxus. He was the same young man James dueled at Hogwarts four years ago.

In a flat tone, James answered, “If you paid attention to the report on last night, Grindelwald used a Muggle soldier as part of his team. Our defenses are geared towards magical threats.”

Malfoy gave James an ugly grin. “You are just trying to use the threat to cover your own incompetence. It never would have happened to any decent wizard!”

Before James could respond, Charlie spoke up. "The Count is the best magical fighter in the Unspeakables."

Able interrupted, "I would say our best fighter overall."

Charlie nodded, "If the Count tells you something about fighting or combat, listen. He has more experience in war than anyone in our Ministry."

Malfoy pounded on the table. "We don't need Muggle things corrupting our world!" The murmurs of agreement he heard in the room disturbed James.

James took a hold of his rising temper. "A proper Shield Charm will stop a bullet." Malfoy looked smug at that concession. At least until James continued. "However, it takes a lot of energy to maintain. The average wizard can stop five rounds before draining himself. A wizard like Professor Dumbledore can probably hold out for five to ten times that."

"Muggle weapons can't fire that fast," Malfoy sneered. "By the time they could fire that many a proper wizard would have killed them all."

James laughed. "You have no idea what you are talking about. Muggles are much better at killing each other than wizards. This war will kill millions. They don't use muskets and pikes anymore."

"How dare you! Do you know who I am? I will have your job!"

Before James could respond, Abel cast a charm causing a thunderclap to sound in the room. "That is enough! We have too much to do today! We will discuss the recommendations for defending the Ministry at a later meeting." Malfoy still looked rebellious but held his tongue. James merely nodded.

"Very well." Abel pointed to a witch halfway down the table. "Mrs. Abercrome from International Cooperation monitors eastern Europe. Please report the situation in Poland."

The witch stood. "At approximately five this morning our time, elements of the German army entered Poland. The Polish Muggles

were caught by surprise and are relatively poorly equipped. The Germans are quickly overrunning the Polish forces.

We have reports that the wizard village near Zbaszyn was destroyed. We have heard a combined Muggle and Dark Army unit did it. Anti-apparition wards were erected. A few survivors were able to use Portkeys or brooms to clear the area. Approximately 90 of the village was killed.” The room went silent.

The witch continued. “We have reports that the Muggle Soviet Union is preparing to invade also. No word has come from the eastern Polish border to confirm or deny this.”

“The Polish Ministry of Magic has started transferring many of their important personnel and documents to an emergency location outside London.”

Charlie leaned over to James and whispered, “So we get their bureaucrats and politicians while their Aurors die in the rear guard.”

“Hopefully their best will make it or go underground,” James answered.

One wizened old wizard asked, “What about their children?”

Mrs. Abercrome smiled briefly. “Fortunately, the Gdansk School of Magic is not near the German or Soviet Union borders. The school is actually located in a small town named Puck Miasto outside the city. The students arrived two days ago. They have about 350 students. They have already contacted Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and a couple of the smaller schools about accepting the students either here or in France.”

James knew that France fell quickly in his timeline and saw no reason to expect that to change. “I suggest we get as many of them into the UK as possible. France will be the next battleground.”

Mrs. Abercrome pursed her lips. “You think the Germans will come west?”

“Remember what Grindelwald really wants. Poland fits in with Hitler’s plans. Both of them seem England as a target. They will have to go through France to get here. The more students here now, the less we have to move again later.”

Abel nodded his agreement. “We can talk to Headmaster Dippet and some of the small schools to see if we can take all of them.”

“Best prepare them for the French and Low Countries students as well.” James added.

A Ministry official looked shocked at the suggestion. “Surely you don’t think it will be that bad! Muggle wars have never touched us in the past!”

James frowned. “This is not a Muggle war. We face something unseen since the dawn of the Roman Empire. Magical and Muggle forces are moving in a united purpose.” Malfoy let out a derisive snort, but James ignored him. “Grindelwald is a Dark Lord. He wants to conquer magical Britain just like Hitler wants the Muggle part. They will work together to meet their goals.”

“The Dark Lord must be using that Muggle fool! He would never accept that scum as a partner!” Malfoy yelled out.

James nodded, “You may be right.”

Malfoy looked stunned, “You agree with me?”

“I agree it is a possibility,” James answered with a disarming openness. “But I have to ask, so what? If Grindelwald does plan to eliminate Hitler, it will not be until after they have conquered Britain. It won’t matter to us at that point. We’ll be dead.”

James could have picked out the pureblood bigots in the room after his comment. Unfortunately, that appeared to be most of the room. Hermione would have been shocked. The bigotry she encountered was an improvement over magical Britain in the 1930’s! (‘Okay,’ James thought whimsically, ‘maybe she wouldn’t be. She probably read all the books on it.’)

The meeting ended shortly afterwards. James felt like history was repeating itself in a strange way. This Ministry was treating this war as they did Voldemort. They arrogantly assumed their superiority over both the Muggles and the forces of Grindelwald. Not for the first time, James wished History of Magic at Hogwarts covered more than the Goblin Rebellions. He really wanted to know how the MoM resisted Grindelwald in his timeline.

As he walked out of the conference room, a frown crossed James's face. 'Knowing the Ministry, whatever we learned in History would have been Ministry propaganda and not the real events anyway.'

James was called into the Minister's office early that afternoon. The morning had been spent monitoring reports from magical and Muggle sources for news from Poland. The magical refugees continued. The Polish Minister of Magic refused to leave, but sent his senior Undersecretary on his behalf. A hastily converted Muggle warehouse served as office space for the displaced Polish Ministry.

The members of the Polish Ministry were understandably stressed. In the last day, they had gone from peace to being refugees. Many of their families had either not arrived yet or were staying in tents at the Chudley Cannons stadium. (The Cannons were already out of the playoffs and would not be needing it for a while.) Although most of the Polish Ministry workers recognized the stress, but tempers were fraying.

James walked into the Minister's conference room and felt his stomach clench. Abraxus Malfoy sat with the Minister and smiled smugly at James. Five other people sat at the table in addition to the Minister and Malfoy. James recognized Mallica Malfoy, Zebedee Longbottom (who looked nothing like Neville), Thomas Potter, Acturis Black, and Calicus Flint. Behind his hood James frowned; one friendly face, two possible neutral and four probable hostiles. This looked did not look like this would be a happy meeting.

James frowned in his hood. Thomas did not know about James's role as an Unspeakable. So he would not necessarily be a friendly face. Great.

The Minister waved James into the room. "Come in, Count."

James took a seat at the end of the table. "May I help you, Minister?"

The politician took an apologetic expression on his face. James didn't buy it. "I am sorry to call you here when I know you are so busy with this crisis in Poland." The comment came as slightly sarcastic.

"Not at all, sir" James answered.

"These gentlemen represent the Wizengamot. We have had several discussions on the role of the Unspeakables in this crisis. Some are concerned that a secretive organization like the DoM is getting too much power."

"Should I ask Mr. Abel to join us?" James asked.

Mallica sneered at James. "You are the one we don't trust. You are obviously a Mud-blood lover!"

"I really hate that term," James sighed. "I have had my own issues with some Muggles. Just like I have had issues with some wizards. I have found both have the same chances of being a git."

Thomas Potter's face showed a trace of amusement. All of the other wizards in the room seemed infuriated by the comment.

"Minister, this is exactly what I meant about his attitude!" Abraxus Malfoy shrieked. James realized Lucius was much more collected when faced with opposition. Apparently, Draco inherited his over-the-top behavior from his grandfather. "This fool thinks Muggles can hurt wizards!"

James turned his glare towards the younger Malfoy. "Mr. Malfoy made an incorrect assumption on the capabilities of Muggles. I was attempting to correct his error."

Mallica Malfoy smacked the table. "A Muggle could never harm a prepared wizard!"

James turned to the Minister. "May I do a demonstration?"

The Minister looked uncomfortable. "What do you mean?"

James turned to the silent Mr. Flint. "Sir, could you please conjure a table and a vase in the far corner of the room?" After getting a nod from the Minister, Flint provided the requested items.

Now James looked at the Minister while pulling something out of his robes. "Minister, I informed Mr. Malfoy that the average wizard can stop five Muggle bullets with a Shield Charm. He claims they would never be able to fire enough to take down the shield in a reasonable amount of time."

"And I still say that!"

James set a pistol on the table. "This is a Colt M1911A1. It is an American made weapon and is their militaries standard sidearm for officers. I am going to ask Mr. Malfoy to cast a Shield Charm on that vase. If he can hold it for thirty seconds, I will resign."

The Malfoys looked like Christmas came early. The Minister seemed dubious at best. The others seemed concerned except Thomas Potter. He again seemed amused.

The Minister reluctantly nodded. "Proceed."

James looked at Abraxius Malfoy. "Would you care to do the honors?"

Malfoy sneered and drew his wand, casting the spell.

"Mr. Potter, will you time for us?" James asked. His grandfather nodded.

James picked up the pistol and fired a round at the shield. The loud crack of the pistol made the room jump. Six more rapid cracks sounded in the small room. The seventh bullet smashed into the vase. The wizards looked stunned.

James safed the pistol then allowed the emptied clip to drop out of the grip and smoothly replaced it with a full clip. "I am now ready to fire another eight rounds."

"Why would you have such a thing?" Longbottom yelled.

James shrugged. "I have been assigned on missions into Germany and Spain over the last few years. I could not use magic when Muggles were around."

"What?" he yelled again.

James grinned to himself when he realized the other wizards were now slightly deaf. "James pulled out his wand and cast a healing charm on the others. "Sorry about that. I should have told you all to cast a Deafening Charm on yourselves before I started firing." Then he repeated his answer to Mr. Longbottom's question.

Thomas Potter rubbed his ears. "My ears still hurt. But I think you made your point." Flint and Longbottom nodded their agreement. The Malfoys looked shocked.

"I would have never imagined a Muggle weapon could do that," the Minister admitted.

"This is about the weakest weapon in the Muggle military. They have weapons called 'machine guns' capable of firing over five hundred rounds a minute. They fire a much heavier and faster round with more energy. A Shield Charm would not have stopped one of those rounds."

"Minister, my point Mr. Malfoy objected to is the Ministry must be prepared for Grindelwald to send Muggle soldiers to do his bidding. I was shot last night because we did not allow for that situation. I am not talking about a hypothetical, he has already done it."

James glanced around the table. "As for not trusting me, you may have my resignation at any time. For lack of a better term, I was retired from the saving people business. Mr. Abel forced me out of that retirement for my experience.

Gentlemen, I am not a politician. I do not want to be in the Ministry. However, I have been actively fighting Dark Lords since the age of eleven. I will provide you with my experience as long as you feel you need me. If you tell me I am unwanted, I will fade back into my retirement." James paused for a second before adding, "outside of England."

“The Unspeakables recruited you?” Thomas asked.

James grinned, “In a manner of speaking.”

Minister Nott frowned at James. “I understand what you are trying to demonstrate to us. I do not approve of your methods but they were effective.”

“Minister!” Abraxus Malfoy started to protest.

Nott raised his hand to silence him. “Count, you have provided valuable advise and counsel in the past. However, I understand the concerns of others who fear you may become too powerful. I hope you can understand that.”

James silently nodded his agreement.

“Thank you.” Nott absently rubbed his cheek. “I will be creating a new Ministry post for the duration of this war. I am calling it the Defense Marshall. This post will be responsible for coordinating all of our defenses and stopping this Dark Lord.”

“Minister, you can’t think about naming this man to the post!” Flint protested pointing at James.

“No, I think the Count is probably best utilized in the field. No offense Count but if I put you in charge we will probably run out of paper-pushers.”

For the first time that day, James laughed. “I do get a bit impatient,” James agreed.

“As a member of the Wizengamot, Thomas would you accept the post?” the Minister asked.

Thomas Potter looked surprised at the offer. “I am surprised, Theodore. Why would you pick me?”

The Minister shrugged. “Politics mostly. You represent the second largest voting block in the Wizengamot. I need to ensure our government stays stable. Also I think you can handle the job.”

James watched his grandfather consider the offer. James knew he would do it. The “saving people thing” was not a Harry Potter trait. It was simply a Potter trait.

“I accept,” Thomas said.

“Good, you begin immediately. I will call a department head meeting as soon as we finish here to announce your appointment.” Looking around the room, the Minister said, “I think that concludes our business here today. We have too many other matters to handle. Thank you.” The Minister rose signifying they were all dismissed.

A hand on his shoulder stopped James from following the rest out of the conference room. James turned to see his grandfather holding him back.

“Stay a minute, please,” he requested.

James noticed the Minister was also still in the room. He turned to face the two wizards.

The Minister started, “The Blacks and the Malfoys have taken a dislike to you. They will fight any proposal you propose or support. They are too powerful politically, socially, and economically for me to ignore.”

“I understand, Minister,” James said.

Thomas frowned, “Mr. Abel tells me you are his best field agent. I don’t want to take you out of the field, but I want you to be my eyes and ears in the field; a roving troubleshooter.”

“I can do that, Mr. Potter.”

The Minister spoke up, “One last item, Count. We are placing a large amount of trust into your hands. Would you please tell us who you are?”

James frowned. Then he said, “I would need a Wizard’s Oath from both of you.”

The Minister looked disapproving. "We will not tell anyone."

"I would not expect you to tell anyone willingly. However Legilency or Veritaserum could force you to give the information. The Dark Army already has a file on me. I don't want a real name to go with it."

The Minister and Thomas Potter shared a look. James understood.

"Your families are not in any immediate danger. However, the rules are different in my world."

The Minister nodded, "We will take the Oath." Thomas Potter nodded his agreement.

James cast a variety of privacy charms on the room. Then the two men gave their Oaths. Once they were done, it was James's turn. He turned from them and cancelled the distortion charm on his hood. Then he lowered his hood. James turned to face the two men.

James was glad he had left the aging glamours on his face. It kept the Minister from asking what an eighteen-year-old boy was doing as an Unspeakable.

"Hello, Thomas," James said.

"James!" Thomas whispered in shock.

The Minister looked at Thomas in surprise. "You know this man, Thomas?"

Thomas nodded, "His name is James Evans."

Now the Minister looked shocked. "James Evans? You mean the Phoenix Foundation James Evans?"

James made a faux bow, "The one and only, Minister. I told you your son was safe at my house."

Both wizards looked shocked. James suppressed a grin at the sight. The Minister sank slowly back into his seat and stared in thought.

“Did the DoM pay for the Phoenix Foundation to create your cover?” the Minister asked.

James shook his head in denial. “I told you the truth. I moved to Hogsmeade after years fighting another Dark Lord. I started the Foundation with my money to help orphans like my son and myself. The DoM recruited me to help pull those Aurors out of Germany.”

The Minister winced at the reminder of that disastrous mission. “You were part of the rescue force?”

“After the senior members were killed or captured, I took command.”

The Minister nodded. Then he chuckled, “No wonder Abbott’s Aurors could not get any information on you. It drove them spare.”

James smiled, “I had my wards up before I joined the Unspeakables. I do like my privacy and my experience made me a bit paranoid.”

“James, I want you to be careful,” his grandfather said. “If anything happens to you under my watch, Elizabeth will never let me back into the Manor. Not to mention what Sarah and the kids would do to me.”

The Minister smiled, “Excellent, I can see the two of you will work together well. Now we have a meeting to schedule to announce Thomas’s new position.”

After James replaced his hood and removed the wards, the three men walked out of the conference room to deal with the new war.

September 3, 1939

“The Muggle British and French governments are declaring war on Germany in an hour.”

James turned in his desk chair to face the speaker in the doorway. He was not surprised to see his grandfather. “We knew it was coming. These treaties did not leave them much choice.”

The elder Potter nodded. “I need to go to Hogwarts. The Polish department head of their Department of Magical Education is meeting

with the Headmaster and Albus. He has a concern about security. Care to come along?"

James glanced distastefully at the report he was reading. "Sounds like an excellent plan to me. Anything to get out of this asylum."

A short time later, James and Thomas were walking up the path to Hogwarts. They had Apparated to the edge of the wards rather than use the Floo. The Floo network was congested with incoming refugees from Poland or British wizards living on or visiting the continent returning due to the impending war.

Unlike his previous visits, the students did not seem too nervous on seeing an Unspeakable walking towards the Headmaster's office. 'I guess they have gotten used to seeing me.' James thought.

Thomas gave the current password to the gargoyle (Dippet was fond of using plant names) and they walked up to the office.

Before they could knock, a voice called out, "Come in, gentlemen."

Thomas preceded James into the room. James saw the Headmaster sitting with Albus Dumbledore, Madam Catchbottom and an unknown wizard.

James looked at the Headmaster and said, "One of these days I am going to find out how the Headmasters always know who is standing outside their door."

Dippet smiled, "Even the Department of Mysteries must have some unanswered questions. May I introduce you to Mr. Karol Mikolajow of the Polish MoM? Mr. Mikolajow, this is Thomas Potter and the Count. Mr. Potter is our new Defense Marshall. The Count is a part of his staff."

The Polish wizard stood to greet them, "Please call me Karol. It is nice to meet you both." The wizard spoke with just a trace of an accent. He appeared to be the same age as Professor Dippet.

"Karol, please call me Thomas. My friend here is just the Count. He likes to be mysterious."

"We have heard of the Count." Karol stated. He looked at James. "Your exploits in Dachau and Berlin were most impressive."

James was a little shocked. "How did you know about Berlin?"

Karol grinned, "Your operation crossed one of ours. Your secondary team tripped a ward. When we investigated we uncovered your code name. No sign of you was ever detected."

"It seems Magical Education covers a broad area in Poland," James commented in a dry tone.

"I was once in the Trade, many years ago. I am still in our Oversight Committee."

James nodded his acceptance of the comment but made a mental note to alert Cain on the possible breach in security.

The Headmaster called everyone's attention to him. "We are here to discuss the influx of Polish students we expect in the next couple of weeks. I have asked Madam Catchbottom to join us as she currently runs the largest magical primary school in Britain."

"How many new students are we talking about, Karol?" Dumbledore asked.

"The current enrollment at Gdansk was 250. Some may go to the Rasputin school in Russia. Others will go to Beauxbatons or some of the lesser schools in France and Britain. I would expect half of them to attend here," the Polish ministry official answered. "A similar amount of pre-magical education children will also be here."

Dumbledore glanced at James and said, "I would recommend we begin planning for students from other countries to arrive here also. Grindelwald and Hitler will not stop with just Poland."

"Surely the Muggle French forces can hold off the Muggle Germans!" Madam Catchbottom exclaimed in surprise.

"I don't believe so." James commented. "Neither the Muggle or magical forces of France are fully prepared. Neither is Britain, but the

Channel will give us the needed time to prepare. Otherwise we would be lost also.”

Madam Catchbottom went white. “Is it that bad?” she whispered.

“Would our children be safe here?” Karol asked.

“I believe so,” James answered. “Hogwarts is far from any Muggle targets and the wards here are stronger than anywhere outside the DoM and Gringotts. The Phoenix school is also very well warded and protected from Muggle aerial bombing by special wards.”

Madam Catchbottom looked shocked again. “It is?”

“Mr. Evans developed them and emplaced them some time ago,” James answered. “We are talking to him about using them on Diagon Alley and other wizarding locations in London.”

“James never said anything,” she commented in a distracted voice.

Thomas shrugged, “Knowing James, he probably hoped they would never be needed.”

“It does sound like a ‘James’ thing to do,” Albus mused.

James felt a bit funny having himself being the topic of conversation, so he changed the subject. “Can Hogwarts handle the additional students?” James asked in an attempt to change the subject.

“We have about 420 enrolled students with the start of this term with about sixty students per year. The school once supported 800 students,” the Headmaster answered.

James felt shocked. The Hogwarts of his time only had half that population. Harry’s year in Gryffindor had eight students. The Hufflepuffs had the largest year with ten. Tom’s Slytherin year had eleven students and was the smallest House.

James cursed Professor Binns, the Purebloods, and the Ministry of his time under his breath. The magical world in Harry’s timeline apparently lost almost half of its population either in this war or in

Voldemort's first rise. Even without those losses, the school in 1939 supported barely half of its capacity. No wonder students always could find unused classrooms for getting into trouble! Yet, no one talked about the declining magical population. Binns concentrated on Goblin Wars. The Purebloods and the Ministry ignored all of the signs.

James idly wondered if something in magic cause a wizard's long-term decision making and common sense to get AK'ed.

Madam Catchbottom commented, "We have about the same number of students in each of our five years of pre-Hogwarts age children. About half of them are squibs or will not attend Hogwarts for a variety of reasons."

"Can you take more students?" Thomas asked.

"We can add about 20 with overcrowding. It would be uncomfortable in the long term though," she answered.

"We could set up a second school in a safe location," James suggested. "I would suggest in Wales."

"Why Wales?" Thomas asked.

"A couple of reasons. It is further from Germany and not likely to contain any priority targets. Also the Muggle war effort is likely to concentrate in England and Scotland. It reduce the chance of incidents of conflict," James replied.

Thomas looked thoughtful. "I own an old hunting preserve near a village called Godric's Hollow. It is almost as isolated as Hogsmeade. We could place it there."

Albus smiled, "That sounds like an excellent idea."

Karol smiled. "I appreciate all of efforts on the behalf of my people. The teachers of Gdansk will be available to teach classes here. I believe most of them have already reached safety here."

The Headmaster smiled, "I am sure our students will appreciate the chance to get to meet your students."

September 29, 1939

Found Thomas, Albus and Karol Mikolajow sitting in the Hog's Head late in the afternoon of the twenty-ninth. None of the wizards looked happy. Nor could James blame them.

Seventeen days after the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Soviet army crossed the opposite border. Many were initially excited by the news. They thought that they were responding to the assistance of their neighbor. They were rudely disabused of that theory.

Caught between two superior armies, the Muggle Polish government held out for ten more days. The hopelessly ill-equipped Polish military fought a valiant rearguard action to allow as many of their people to escape as possible. Cavalry on horseback stood little chance against tanks and ground strafing fighter planes on two fronts.

The Polish Ministry of Magic suffered as badly as the Muggle. Grindelwald's Dark Army forces used Portkeys to quickly attack targets well behind the Muggle combat lines. A week after the war started, a Dark ritual destroyed the main Ministry building, taking the Polish Minister and most of his senior staff. Karol was now the second ranking Polish MoM official.

All of the Gdansk students were successfully evacuated to either Hogwarts or the new "Welsh" school. Only half of the children too young for Gdansk made it out of the country. The Dark Army moved too quickly to get Portkeys to all of them.

James approached the three Firewhiskey drinking wizards. "It is official. The Soviets and the Nazis divided Poland. It looks like they had an agreement before the war started."

"Join us, Count, as we drink to my country!" Karol said in a loud voice.

James ignored the offer. He cast a wandless privacy charm and continued, "We did get a message your Unspeakables. They moved to a hidden safe facility before the Ministry building was destroyed. They lost half their number in the fighting but they remain an intact force."

Karol looked momentarily brightened. "That is good news. They will keep the invaders from getting too comfortable."

"They also passed on to us information on a German Muggle they are supporting in an assassination attempt on Hitler," James added.

"They are working with a Muggle?" Thomas asked in surprise.

James nodded, "He is not aware of their assistance. It was all his plan. The Polish Unspeakables have simply been covering him from Dark Army detection. Their wards keep our wizards too far away to directly become involved. We are going to be taking over the magical protection of the man."

"Can we not make sure he is successful?" Thomas asked.

"If we use any magic on him or the bomb, the wards will detect him. Our best bet is to make sure he gets his chance." James stated. "His name is George Elser. He plans to strike at a speech in Berlin on November 8th. One of the Polish Unspeakables overheard him planning his attempt with a friend. Nothing was done until this month when the invasion started."

Albus looked sad but he said, "I do not like the idea of killing anyone, but I think we need to drink a toast to the brave man in his attempt to stop the spread of Darkness." After they all drank, Albus asked James, "Do you think he has a good chance?"

James understood what his old (future?) Headmaster was really asking. "Any chance must be seized. I believe even if he knew it was doomed to failure he would still make the attempt. He knows it is a forlorn hope. I have been in his shoes. Sometimes you win, sometimes you survive, but you still have to make the attempt."

Albus and Thomas understood the message from James. Knowing the story of Harry Potter, they knew how much of his fight with Voldemort seemed a forlorn hope. Coming back in time to change history was another in a long line of them for Harry Potter.

James picked up a glass of the Firewhiskey. Taking a quick drink, James said, "A teacher of mine introduced me to a Muggle poet

named Kipling during some particularly dark days. I was always taken with 'If'." Then James set the glass on the bar and walked out.

As he passed the barman, James greeted him, "Aberforth, make sure the old man gets back up to the castle safely."

The barman grunted in a noncommittal fashion. Watching the Unspeakable walk out of the bar, Aberforth was caught by an odd sense of déjà vu.

James disillusioned himself outside of the Hog's Head making it look and sound like he Apparated away. Then he simply walked home. It was a pleasant September Scottish night. The air was slightly cool but the sky was clear. On such a beautiful night it seemed obscene to think about the recent start of war.

Reaching his house, James removed his Unspeakable robes before stepping into the house. Although Sarah 'knew' about James other job, he could not be that blatant about his Unspeakable status.

"Good evening, dear." Sarah called as he walked in the door. "Dinner is almost ready."

"I expected to miss dinner tonight," James said surprised. "I thought the twins and you would have eaten two hours ago. How did you know when I would be home?"

Sarah walked up and hugged James and gave him a kiss. James was really enjoying the kiss when she pulled away. She reached up and pulled on his nose gently and answered his earlier question with a cheeky smile. "Magic" Then she pulled his arm, "Come on, we can eat and I'll tell you about my day."

James groaned playfully. Honestly, he looked forward to it. After all the bad news from Europe and dealing with the Ministry bureaucrats (Arrogant prats!) , James looked forward to hearing about the everyday problems of the St. Mungos pediatric ward. It helped put things in perspective.

James snuggled into his bed, his arms wrapped around his beautiful wife. As a boy, Harry never truly enjoyed sleeping. Sleeping in a

cupboard and having Uncle Vernon around did not make for restful sleeping conditions. After starting at Hogwarts, the nightmares provided by Voldemort happened frequently enough that sleep was not a welcome event. After the war, every day and night seemed to be a perpetual nightmare.

Since coming to this time and marrying Sarah, James learned to love his sleep. Sleeping curled around his wife in his own house healed James in a way Madam Pomfrey's spells and potions never could. Sleeping in his bed with his wife behind the wards and protections of his house, James felt truly safe and loved.

It was out of this warm, comfortable place that James was dragged out of kicking and screaming. He was dreaming about Tom. He was yelling for James from a distance.

James opened his eyes and heard the voice call him again. Quickly, James jumped out of bed and opened his wardrobe. Hanging inside the door was a small round mirror. He could see Tom's face in the mirror.

"Tom, what's wrong?"

"Dad! Something is happening up here. The alarms went off and all of the doors locked. I can't even use parseltongue to open my dorm door!"

"I am on my way. Stay in your room and barricade your door," James instructed Tom.

Tom nodded, "Okay, Dad. Please hurry!"

James set the mirror down and quickly woke his wife. Sarah was still drowsy when James told her to call the Ministry. "Call the Aurors. Tell them to send reinforcements to Hogwarts. Tell them the code is Horntail."

Sarah looked concerned when she realized the implications of what James was telling her. "James Evans, you be careful. Make sure Tom is safe." Then she kissed him before he could run out the door.

James grabbed his wands, Unspeakable cloak, and his equipment as he ran for the door. As he reached the door, he noticed a large shape standing at the door, Snuffles.

"You sense something is wrong, don't you?" he asked the dog. Snuffles wagged his tail slightly. "I know boy, but I want you to stay here. Watch Sarah and the twins." Snuffles whined and placed his tail down.

"Snuffles goes with you, James. You need someone to watch your back," Sarah interrupted.

"You and the twins could be in danger!"

"You will be in danger, Harry James Potter Evans! We don't have time for this! Both of you, go!"

James and Snuffles were running out the door before James had time to think about it. Once clear of the house, James changed to his wolf form. The huge black dog and the large grey wolf quickly cleared the village, almost invisible in the night.

Reaching the point where the Whomping Willow would later stand, James could here the sounds of magical combat coming from up ahead. Both canines moved faster.

They ran past a body in an Auror's red cloak. Wolf-James paused slightly to sniff the body. It did not smell of blood but did smell dead. James recognized the scent of the Killing Curse. In an instant, he was back in pursuit of Snuffles.

James caught up to Snuffles just short of the Great Hall entrance. The two animals slowed as the sounds of spells became louder. James crept quietly down the hall following some odd scents. Snuffles followed a couple of meters behind him. James recognized this passage way led directly towards the gargoyle protecting the Headmaster's office.

James noticed four men standing in front of the gargoyle. At the gargoyles feet lay three bodies of Aurors. That accounted for all of the Aurors assigned to guard the school. Two of the men held Muggle

weapons. The other two wore the robes of the Dark Army. As James watched one of the weapons fired, causing a great deal of damage to the gargoyle in a thunderous explosion. James realized the gargoyle would not be able to withstand too many more hits from those weapons.

Snuffles growled and raced into the room directly at the two with Muggle weapons. In a tremendous leap, the huge dog crashed into the Muggle with the loaded weapon. Both the dog and the Muggle hit the ground. James missed the rest as he reverted to his human form and attacked the two wizards.

Two Killing Curses flew at James instantly. He dove to the ground in a roll to avoid the curses. Coming up out of his roll, James pointed his wand and murmured, "*Reducto!*" It was followed by four more, all at the same wizard.

The wizard dodged the first, but missed seeing the ones following in his concentration on the first spell. The second and third spells crashed into his shield. The fourth spell slashed through the depleted shield and smashed into his shoulder. The Dark Army wizard's right shoulder almost completely ceased to exist in an instant. The fifth spell passed harmlessly over the wizard as he dropped to the ground, already going into shock.

James saw this out of the corner of his eye as he focused on the remaining wizard. James expected to see more spells coming at him but instead the wizard stood in a ready position.

"Impressive. It is so rare to see a true fighter. Such a wonderful sight." Hearing the light soprano voice with a slight German accent, James suddenly realized this wizard was actually a witch.

"I am so glad you enjoyed the show. I know your friend did not," James commented.

The Dark Army witch chuckled lightly. "I am sure he did not. My name is Christina. We did not expect you to respond so quickly. Again, I am impressed. You must have wards that we missed."

James did not comment that only a Second year with a magical communication mirror alerted him to the attack.

“May I have your name. I so love to know my worthy opponents.”

James nodded, “I am the Count.”

Now she looked excited. “The Count! This is an honor! The best of the British Unspeakables! I must leave you now. I am sure we shall meet again.”

James almost had to laugh at her sheer gall. It was almost like dealing with a sane Bellatrix. The brown haired witch gave James a happy smile.

“I can’t let you leave,” James told her.

“How can you stop me, my dear Count? I believe your Minister’s son is a student here. Several of my other... friends are searching for him. I assure you I will not be as easy as this oaf.” She indicated the wizard bleeding to death on the castle floor.

James believed her. Her casual stance spoke of experience and confidence. James was sure he had her beat in pure power, but the fight would take too long if others were searching for the Slytherin Second year dorm. Protecting the students took priority over fighting this witch.

“Do I have your word you will leave here and return to Germany?” James asked.

The witch nodded, “By my magic, I swear. I really look forward to the chance to work against you in the future. I love a challenge.”

Then she reached into her robe and activated a Portkey. James cast his magical radar charm to ensure she really left. No sign of her remained.

James looked over at Snuffles. The large dog sat atop the two Muggles watching James’s conversation with the witch. James summoned Snuffles and then cast Stunners on all the two Muggles

and the dying wizard. A quick healing charm stopped the bleeding but he would need help to survive the night.

Turning to Snuffles, James said, "Go to Tommy, boy. Get Tommy!"

Snuffles turned and ran off with a loud woof. Wolf-James was right behind him. Now to make sure Tom was safe.

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on !";

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;

If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

Rudyard Kipling

A/N: I want to thank all of the reviews. Jbern submitted my 400th review! I really enjoy your comments and incorporate many of your suggestions and comments into the later chapters. I have created a forum to discuss this story. You can find the link on my profile page.

I included Kipling's 'If' at the end of this chapter. I thought of this poem during GoF and OoF. I always thought it was too bad no one did introduce Harry to this poem.

Thanks again!

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Chapter 15 – The Hogwarts Front

September 1, 1939

Tom climbed out of the Muggle taxi with conflicting feelings. While excited to return to school with his friends, Tom knew the war truly started today. Tom knew his Dad would be deeply involved in the fighting. Dad would claim he was safe in an office, but Tom knew the truth even if he never said it aloud.

Tom knew he owed his father's "saving people thing" for his life. It was a strange think to absolutely know what his life would have been like if Dad never saved him from the orphanage. Tom tried not to think about the deaths and suffering he would have caused. In some ways, the knowledge he would have murdered his adopted grandparents' son and daughter-in-law hurt the most.

James Evans confused his son. Harry Potter lost his parents, friends, teachers and everyone else he cared for before defeating Voldemort. Dad admitted his mission coming back in time was to kill Tom Riddle before he could become Lord Voldemort. Instead, he adopted him. Tom knew his father loved him. Tom loved him back but his father's actions confused him. How could he care about the boy who would have eventually murdered all of his family and friends?

Tom knew the full story of the events leading to his birth. Once Tom learned part of the story, Dad told him the whole story. Their selfish behavior infuriated Tom. His mother magically raped his father. No one else used those terms but Tom looked up Love Potions in the Hogwarts library last year. Then Tom Riddle, Sr. ignored and denied the existence of his innocent son. Tom could logically understand the desperation, emotional scaring, and fear that drove both of their actions. That logical understanding did not prevent Tom from hating them and all the Gaunts and Riddles.

Tom was an innocent baby when he was left in the orphanage. None of the offenses had been his. None of the blame could be laid at his door. Yet he paid a high price for their actions, or inaction. Tom tried not to think about his hatred of them too much because of his father.

Dad explained his history; losing his parents, living with his abusive Aunt and Uncle, and fighting Voldemort. Tom admitted Harry Potter had even more justification for hating then Voldemort ever did. Yet, Dad did not hold Voldemort's actions against Tom. Although he knew the decisions and actions Tom Riddle would have made if left alone, Dad saw him as a completely different person.

Tom wasn't so sure. He could feel the anger within him. He could not forgive people who hurt him as Dad did. Maybe it was the Slytherin in him, but he just couldn't see himself as the hero his Dad was. Now Dad was off fighting to save all of Britain again. Sometimes at night Tom worried he would one day give into the temptation and follow Voldemort's path rather than Harry Potter's path. Tom was afraid he was cursed to go Dark.

"Tom, hurry up. You don't want to miss the train."

Tom's mother's voice jerked him out of his thoughts. "I am coming!" he called back. Tom hurriedly grabbed his trunk from the taxi's boot and placed it on a waiting cart. Sarah Evans already had the twins in her arms.

Sarah easily moved through the crowd ahead of Tom. The twins looked curiously around at the crowds with smiles on their 18-month-old faces. James had placed a mild Hovering Charm on their carriers. This reduced their apparent weight to 1/5 of their actual so Sarah was able to handle them easily.

Tom smirked at the smiles and comments the twins received. Tom felt his mum was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. The twins were an interesting mix of Mum and Dad. Michael with Dad's hair and those odd colored eyes and Katie with her blond hair and glass green eyes were definitely beautiful babies in Tom's unbiased opinion. (Not that Tom would ever admit all of that out loud where his classmates could hear him!)

Reaching the entrance to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, Sarah glanced around to see if anyone was watching. She noticed a number of Muggle men watching her. With a sigh she reached down into a pocket and pulled out a gift from James. He told her a pair of pranksters from his time sold them in Diagon Alley.

Slipping the ring on her finger, Sarah laughed to see all of the men's gazes go unfocused and return their attention to something else. James refused to tell her who the pranksters were but she knew they were geniuses. Placing a Notice-Me-Not charm on a ring powered by the wearer's own magic was brilliant. They must have been at the top of their Hogwarts classes as this was easily NEWT 'O' level charms work.

With the attention diverted, Sarah led Tom through the portal. Tom never noticed the charm's effects since he was keyed into them. With a last glance around, Tom pushed his cart through the portal.

Seeing the Express engine sitting on the track brought a smile to Tom's face. Even with the outbreak of war, the Express seemed to promise fun and excitement. Tom's mood lifted immediately. He began looking around excitedly for his friends.

Sarah noticed her son's smile. Sarah remembered the beaten and suspicious little boy James first brought into St. Mungos all of those years ago. The little boy had captured her heart almost from the first moment she had seen him. The only reason it had not been THE moment she saw him was she saw Tom and James at the same moment. Her eyes had not known which way to go. A smug smile came to Sarah's lips. 'But I got them both,' she thought.

As she grew to know them in the hospital, she learned James and Tom had been injured in similar ways. Both traumatized by their early lives, James was actually the worst because he had eighteen years of it against Tom's eight. Sarah proved her place as a Hufflepuff. She loved them. Her simple 'Puff love and patience (with a lot of hard work) paid off in her boys. A remarkable difference was noticeable over the last few years.

A pair of girls' voices rang out over the platform, "Tommy!"

Tom and his mother looked to the train to see Mary Greengrass and Sumta Xurana waving out of the window.

Sarah grinned at her son. "Your fan club is here."

"Mum!" Tom protested.

"It is okay, dear," Sarah teasingly reassured him, "parents learn to accept when their handsome son's start collecting fan clubs."

Tom went red over his mother's teasing. His blush covered his whole face and neck. Girls... confused him. The Slytherin girls of his year along with Nott were his closest friends. But some of his recent feelings left him feeling really confused. Tom was sure Dad would understand but his teasing would probably be worse.

"I can't wait until the twins are older and the other pair arrives. Then you'll be distracted enough not to notice that kind of thing!" Tom grumped.

Sarah's grin grew a bit wider. "I will always notice girls around my son." Tom felt oddly comforted by the comment.

In short order, Tom's trunk was loaded on the train. Sarah gave her son a hug and a kiss. Then she reminded him to be good. "You might want to remind Dad to do that too," he told her with a cheeky smile.

Sarah tugged on his ear, "You two are too much alike! It is not fair to do to a poor mother!"

Tom laughed as Katie used this as an opportunity to pull her mother's hair and shove a fistful into her mouth.

Pulling her hair free, Sarah commented in mock exasperation, "I hope I can survive two more Evans children on top of the four I already have!" Tom laughed at her inclusion of Dad as one of the kids. Sarah's eyes became serious for a moment. "I will let you know if anything happens. You concentrate on your schoolwork and have fun."

Tom smiled and kissed his little brother and sister goodbye. "Keep Mum and Dad on their toes!" The twins giggled at the sound of his voice. The bell rang the last call for the train. Tom hurried onto the train and turned to wave goodbye before looking for his friends.

Tom enjoyed the trip to Hogwarts. The six Slytherin girls filled the compartment with Tom and Nott. All of the students except Alicia Tadweiter had seen each other over the summer. All of the

Slytherin's lived in purely magical households, so they often Floo'd to visit over the summer. Alicia was the exception because her parents took her on a safari to magical Africa. They only returned three days before the start of the term.

After the initial welcomes ended, the topic of the outbreak of war in Europe came up. Tabitha Figg's opinion seemed to summarize the girl's general sentiment.

"Why should that impact us? The Dark Lord seems interested in eastern Europe, not us," Tabitha commented.

Laura Parkinson added, "My father said the Dark Lord wanted free access to continue his studies so we can get rid of the Muggles. He went to Hogwarts. Shouldn't the Slytherins support him?"

Tom started to get angry at Laura's comments but held back a biting retort. A Gryffindor response would not help. She was only repeating the anti-Muggle sentiments of the majority of the magical world.

"Actually, Laura, he was a Ravenclaw." Tom turned to Nott and asked, "Why do people assume that the Dark Lord had to come from our House? Even we do it. No wonder the other Houses hate us."

Nott grinned at the comment but Laura interrupted before he could answer. "The Dark Lord Grindelwald was a Ravenclaw?! How do you know that?"

Tom shrugged. "I told Dolohov a year ago. He was in the same year as Professor Dumbledore and Thomas Potter. You just said he wanted to continue his studies. Doesn't that sound like a Ravenclaw?"

The girls looked unsure and the conversation soon turned to the usual topics of life at Hogwarts. Tom occasionally caught Laura giving him considering glances. It bothered Tom that he could see how Voldemort gathered followers and power. The political and social position of the Purebloods truly came out of fear of change. That fear made them willing to follow any banner to resist that change. If they knew Tom was a descendent of Salazar Slytherin, they would be signing up to be his Death Eaters. Dad never mentioned any names

of Death Eaters from Harry's time. (He slipped one time growling about the name Malfoy but Tom was not surprised.) Tom sadly realized that some of his friends in this compartment probably followed him into the Dark.

The remaining trip passed in casual conversations, laughter and Exploding Snap. Tom watched as Nott lost to Mary in wizard chess. Mary was an expert and her pieces knew it. They cheered as she took them out of her case. Nott's pieces looked scared when they saw their owner's opponent.

The train arrived at Hogwarts right on time. (I guess it really does take magic to get the trains to run on time.) The Second years followed the older students as the First years followed Mr. Ogg to the boats. The Slytherins enjoyed the horseless carriage ride to the castle. None of the Slytherin Second years could see what pulled the carriages, although one of the Gryffindor Third years seemed terrified to get into her carriage.

The new Slytherin Fifth year prefects let the Second years into the building. Tom did not know either of them except by reputation. The girl was named Luretia Black. The dark haired girl possessed a permanent scowl. A true Black, she saw even the other Slytherins as being her inferiors. Her Prefect appointment proved to Tom the positions was based on politics, not ability.

The male Prefect was a large brown haired boy with a broken looking nose named Andrew MacDuff. MacDuff seemed the jovial opposite of his female counterpart. He claimed he broke his nose teaching a group of Muggles the right way to play rugby. None of the other Purebloods knew what rugby was but he told them his opponents ended up looking much worse than he did. That made the bigots happy. Learning Tom was a Half-blood, MacDuff told Tom the real story. MacDuff's grandfather married a Muggle-born witch so he was a Half-blood like Tom. He learned rugby while visiting his Muggle cousins. MacDuff loved the game more than Quidditch and enjoyed his Muggle cousins.

The Second year students sat at the end of the Slytherin table closest from the Staff table. Only the new First years sat closer. The prefects

claimed it was so the staff could keep an eye on the immature witches and wizards. Tom figured it was so the older Slytherins could get away with things without the professors catching them.

Tom enjoyed the Sorting Ceremony. It was different watching it from this side. The nervous First years looked terrified walking into the Great Hall. The Headmaster's post-Sorting speech, however, made them all nervous.

After completing his standard greetings and warnings, Dippet turned into new territory. "As you are all aware, a war has started on the continent between the Muggle countries of Germany and Poland. You should also be aware the German Muggles are working jointly with the Dark Lord Grindelwald and his Dark Army. Early reports indicate the Dark Army has already attacked magical villages with many innocent magical losses. Dark Army forces are also responsible for the attack last night on our own Ministry.

Magical refugees from Poland have already started arriving in England. The Ministry is working to place these poor souls. I am sure the Daily Prophet will continue to do its normal excellent job of keeping us all informed. However, if anything occurs impacting the school directly, I will announce it to the entire body of students during the meals."

The old wizard paused for a moment and gave them a gentle smile, "Now, let us feast!"

After dinner, the Slytherins went to their dungeon abode. The Seventh year prefects (neither was a Head) led the new First years through the "welcoming" ceremony. It went smoothly except for one student named Robert Wiley.

The Pureblood bigots in the House (meaning most of the House) recognized Wiley as a true anomaly in Slytherin House. Wiley was a Muggleborn. The small red haired boy looked around with a wonder that only someone with no prior exposure to magic would look that shocked at ghosts, moving staircases and talking Sorting Hats.

With the full approval of the older students, Dolohov, Mulciber and Rosier started bullying the smaller boy. The other First year boys looked too intimidated to help their dorm mate even if they wanted.

Seeing Wiley knocked to the ground, Tom stepped out of the watching crowd, "Leave him alone, Dolohov." Tom hated bullies. The orphanage taught him all about them. Tom noticed if the bully's target didn't fight for themselves, they often became bullies to those weaker than themselves. Tom knew that is what led to his Dark path in Harry's timeline.

The large boy sneered at Tom, "Protecting a Mudblood, Evans? How Gryffindor of you."

"Leave him alone. I won't tell you again," Tom said in a quiet, determined voice. Internally, he actually agreed with Dolohov, this was a Gryffindor thing to do, but he was committed as soon as he opened his mouth.

A Fourth year boy shoved Tom from behind. Tom hit the floor and rolled like his father taught him. Tom pulled out his wand and hissed, *Serpensortia!*

A large cobra appeared on the floor in front of Tom. James taught him the spell to practice his Parceltongue ability. Looking at the snake, Tom hissed, *Scare the boys standing up. Don't bite them.*

Yes, *master.* the snake hissed. The snake rose up spreading its hood and opened its mouth. The three Slytherin Second year boys looked panicked. (Wiley did not look much better.)

"I said to leave him alone."

Backed up against a couch by the snake, Dolohov glared at Tom, "Your snake can't help you forever. You'll pay for this."

Tom gave him a cold laugh. "You live in the House of the Snake. Do you really think my friend here is the only one around me?" Tom glanced around at the gathered members of Slytherin House. "Tell me, what kind of doorknobs do we have? What decorates the poles

of our canopy beds? What decorates almost everything in our House?"

Almost against their will the word, 'snakes' came back whispered in hushed tones.

Tom nodded, "Snakes." Tom hissed a command. Much of the class paled as the many decorative snake statues and doorknobs started to move and hiss at all nearby. "I think I have made my point?"

At the nod from the other students, Tom called the cobra back from the other Second year boys. He bent and picked up the six-foot snake. It slithered up his shoulder and around his neck. "Mr. Wiley, welcome to Slytherin. If the Hat put you here, you desire to be here. Excuse me, my friend here is hungry and I promised him a nice rat."

Tom walked out of the Common Room headed for the kitchens. The rest of Slytherin House, including Tom's friends, watched silently as he walked out of the room. The decorative snakes continued to hiss and snap at the students for five minutes after Tom left

Tom enjoyed his walk to the kitchens with his new friend.

What is your name? Tom asked the snake.

The cobra coiled around Tom to look at him. *I have no name master. I did not exist before your magic summoned me.*

Tom frowned, *I created you? How long will you last?*

The snake released a hissing laugh. *You summoned me. I heard you call in the Serpent Tongue. I will stay until you send me away.*

Tom walked silently as he considered what the cobra had told him. What should I call you? he asked.

What ever you wish, master.

Tom and the cobra entered the kitchen after tickling the pear. A house-elf saw them and immediately ran to them.

“Can Tweaky be helping you Master Tom?”

“Hi Tweaky. Did you have a good summer?” James had drilled manners into Tom when dealing with house-elves.

“We was cleaning all of Hogwarts!” the excited elf squealed. “We even cleans out the Professor Dumblydore’s candy cabinet!”

Tom started laughing, “How did he like that?”

“He’s was happy he got to find new candies to fill it with! He said we can do it next year too!” The image of a castle full of house-elves on sugar highs made Tom laugh harder.

Are you going to raise that rodent? the snake asked.

Excuse me. Tom turned to Tweaky. “Could you find my friend here a nice juicy live rat?”

Tweaky disappeared in a blink only to return an instant later with a large rat in his hand. “Will this do for Scaley, Master Tom?”

Tom never knew snakes could drool before. He smiled at house-elf. “Perfect, Tweaky. Thank you.”

Tom set the snake on the floor and dropped the rat three feet in front of it. In a flash of movement, the snake struck the rat in a sudden blow but released it immediately. The rat attempted to scurry away but dropped before it made it six inches.

Tom whistled silently to himself. His new friend was extremely poisonous. As he watched the snake approach the dying rat, Tom asked, *May I call you Nagini? I had a special friend by that name once.*

The snake paused on his way to the rat. *Nagini, yes, I like it. Thank you master.*

The next morning Tom awoke to find Nagini coiled on top of the canopy of his bed. Tom cast a warming charm on the metal poles of the bed. Feeling the warmth, Nagini gave a contented hiss and

continued sleeping. Tom glanced around noticing only Nott was left in the room. Dolohov and his gang had already left the dorm.

Nott watched this from the comfort of his bed. "You scared the lot of them yesterday, mate. Even the Seventh years are going to be leery around you."

"How about you?"

Nott smirked, "I am doing the Slytherin thing and feeling you out if you would make a good ally on my rise to power."

"And I am just acting your friend in order to use your Ministry connections in my own nefarious schemes," Tom deadpanned.

"I am just leading you on so I can betray you and use your downfall to enhance my own reputation," Nott retorted.

Tom pretended to consider for a moment. "Ahh, but maybe I am simply distracting you while my minion prepares to attack you from behind?"

"What minion?" Nott scoffed. "Unless the girls snuck down here, we are... ARGHH!" Nott screamed as Nagini appeared over his shoulder in his bed.

Tom kept his composure long enough to say, "That minion." Then he dissolved into peals of laughter as Nott jumped out of bed like a rogue Bludger.

"That wasn't bloody funny!" Nott screamed at his laughing friend. Tom laughed helplessly on the bed, the shocked image of Nott locked in his imagination.

After a couple minutes of laughing, Tom gasped out, "I think I can cast a fully formed Patronus right now."

"Git," Nott sneered at Tom. "You just be careful. Paybacks are hell."

Tom settled down, gasping for breath. "I am sorry Nagini scared you. But the look on your face was so funny."

Nott grunted but the ends of his lips curled resisting a smile. "If you are finished, now that I am wide awake we can go to breakfast."

Tom agreed breakfast sounded like a good idea. The two boys quickly dressed and made their way to the Great Hall. It was a Saturday morning so many of the students were using the time to sleep in.

"Why does Hogwarts always have us come on September 1st? Now we have nothing to do until Monday?" Tom wondered as they walked.

Nott shrugged, "Who cares? We are Second years so we can get our brooms out and go flying." Nott casually glanced at his best mate. "What I said in the dorm room about using you was a joke, but expect it to be true from a lot of our House."

Tom grimaced. He knew his friend was right. "I should have kept my mouth shut. It seems to be the Slytherin way to bully those weaker than you but I hate bullies."

"Probably should have expected it, being who your father is and all."

Tom felt stiff at the comment. "What do you mean?" he carefully asked.

Not noticing his friend's discomfort, Nott replied, "Your father started the only magical orphanage in Britain. Moreover, his school accepts squibs. From his comments this summer, I would say you did the same thing he would have done. Except that last thing, the snake thing was really cool." Nott added the last part with a wide grin.

Tom smiled to be compared favorably with his father. Maybe he wasn't doomed to go Dark after all.

September 9, 1939

The first week passed in a blur for Tom and his friends. No new teachers started in the school this year. Professor Merrythought kept talking longingly of retirement but most of the students figured she would always be the DADA professor. Classes quickly settled into a pleasant routine for the Second years.

Many considered Second year to be the best at Hogwarts. First years had to deal with the adjustment to a new school and, for Muggle-born, to magic. Third and Fourth years added elective classes to their class load. Fifth year labored under the burden on OWLS, while Sixth and Seventh years were crushed by NEWT preparation.

Tom took full advantage to the relative freedom of a Second year. The Scottish summer still warmed the air as Tom and Nott spent their first weekend flying on their brooms. The pair played a couple of pick-up Quidditch games against other students. Nagini lay curled atop the stands being warmed by the sun.

A surprising development of the weekend occurred when Snuffles arrived for his weekend visit. The large dog and the cobra treated each other cautiously at first. Their nose (or tongue) sniffing the other in curiosity. Tom felt justifiably nervous about the encounter. However, after a five-minute staring contest, Snuffles gave a low woof and lay down on the stands below and his back to the snake. Nagini seemed shocked to have another dismiss him enough to turn his back on the cobra. Nagini acted offended for a bit but his curiosity overcame his indignation.

Snuffles ignored Nagini as the snake started to make forays into the dog's space. He appeared to sleep as the snake started to slither around and atop the dog. Eventually Nagini settled into a comfortable position on the railing next to Snuffles. As Nagini settled onto the railing, he hissed a warning. Nagini had noticed the doggie grin on the "sleeping" dog's face. Snuffles merely wagged his tail a couple times before settling in for his nap.

Tom watched from his broom as Nagini and Snuffles "introduced" themselves. He almost flew down to break it up before it could become deadly but he held back. Tom's face held a look of amazement as his two animal friends came to some type of terms.

"Hey, Evans!" Notts voice yelled.

Tom ducked as a Bludger flew through the air he previously occupied. Tom turned his attention back to the Quidditch game, leaving his two friends sleeping in the sun.

Xurana, Mary, and the other Slytherin girls seemed hesitant to approach Tom during that first week of school. Although they all knew last year of Tom's Parselmouth abilities, they seemed a bit scared of or angry with their friend.

Tom attempted to end this isolation after a week of classes himself. The girls were working on Potions homework in the Slytherin potions lab. Tom walked into the lab by himself. (Nott was talking to a Fifth year cousin.) Grabbing a stool, Tom sat down across the workbench from the girls.

Mary blushed when she saw Tom and looked down at her potions text. Xurana glared at Tom in a slightly challenging fashion. Penelope, Tabitha, Laura and Alicia followed Mary's lead and tried to ignore Tom's arrival.

Tom watched them in silence for a moment. Then he asked, "Why are you angry with me?"

Mary looked up quickly with an expression Tom was not able to read before she dropped her face back down. The other girls seemed to flinch except for Xurana.

"Angry with you!" the girl hissed. "You threatened the entire House!"

Tom gave her a cheeky grin. "I thought the hissing thing was my thing." Xurana's glare told him his humor was not accepted. Tom was tired of this. He looked straight into Xurana's eyes. "I showed them part of my power. I don't like bullies."

Laura Parkinson looked up. "You were bullying the entire House!"

"No, I stopped Dolohov's petty tyranny the only way that works. By showing him he is not the biggest fish." Tom frowned. "Slytherin is supposed to be the house of the cunning, not the petty thug. A Muggle mugger is the same as they are."

"That mudblood is an insult to the House!" Xurana yelled. "Slytherin would never have allowed him into the House! Who are you to say otherwise?"

Tom smirked, "I am a Half-blood. My father was a Muggle. Am I an insult also?"

Conflicting colors appeared on Xurana's face. Tom struggled to keep from laughing at the red and white patches alternating for dominance.

"But- but- you belong in this House!" she finally sputtered out.

"Why?" Tom asked. "Dolohov pointed out my intervention was a Gryffindor thing to do. Why do I belong in this House?"

"You are a Parseltongue!" she yelled, getting frustrated by Tom's questions.

Tom gave her an innocent smile. "So is my father and he was a Gryffindor. He is their archetype in many ways." Then Tom dropped his smile. "But you are right. I belong in this House, more than anyone else. So much of the Pureblood argument is based on the actions of Salazaar Slytherin. What happened is documented. Have you ever asked why it happened? The 'what' is only half the story. Even if his actions were justified in the past does not mean the justifications are true now!" As Tom was talking, the glassware in the lab started to tremble from his growing magical aura.

Tom gave Xurana an intent stare. "The Hat put Wiley into our House for a reason. All of the Founders had a hand in creating the Hat so they would get the students they would have selected into this House. In effect Salazaar Slytherin himself is the one who says Wiley belongs in this House!"

Tom turned to leave but turned back after only a few steps. Tom gave a sly smile and added, "You know the Hat sorts you by your strongest traits. A Hufflepuff could be very cunning and ambitious but if their loyalty is stronger, that would be their House. Don't think that being in one House would prevent you from also being a good fit in another." Tom turned and left the lab. The glass containers stopped shaking as he left the room.

Mary glanced up and smiled at Tom's retreating back. Xurana was speechless as he left. The other girls looked at each other in surprise. They had never heard Tom speak in such a way. He sounded like an

adult but they could tell the words were his, not the repeat of something he heard.

As he spoke, they felt his magic grow to fill the room. It was rare for a Second year to be able to project an aura of power. Only Xurana, Mary and Laura understood the significance of the display. The other girls took it in stride that his high emotions almost caused accidental magic.

September 29, 1939

Tom now truly understood what his father meant about having a "Harry Potter year". He felt almost completely isolated from Slytherin House. Only Nott was willing to cross the older students by associating with Tom. Even Wiley, the boy Tom defended, gave into the pressure to avoid Tom.

Rifts within Slytherin were supposed to stay within the House. Solidarity in the face of the other Houses was supposed to be the rule. This seemed to be an exception. Being the outcast of the outcast House became an interesting feeling when the whole school knew you were being shunned by your own House.

The part that hurt the worst was the isolation from most of his friends. Ever since the opening of school, his best female friends seemed very nervous around him. Tom admitted he did not handle his attempt to talk to them well. It just seemed to make it worse in most ways. Their isolation of him hurt much worse than the shunning by the rest of the House.

Tom would not have made it through the first month of school save for two things. The first was the presence of Nott, Nagini, and Snuffles (on the weekends). Being the son of the Minister of Magic, Nott felt himself above their pettiness. Tom joked it was because he really liked his mum's deserts and did not want to be cut off. Nott simply smiled and agreed there was some truth to that. What ever the reason, Tom appreciated it deeply. Nagini and Snuffles couldn't care less about human issues. They were loyal to Tom, that simple.

The second weekend of school, Tom and Nott were flying on their brooms as Snuffles and Nagini again slept below. Nott paused to

watch as Tabitha and Laura attempted to pet Snuffles. Snuffles ignored their presence. Nagini hissed at them when they came too close so they could pet the large dog.

Nott laughed and told Tom the girls would end up apologizing just so they could play with Snuffles again. Tom was not sure he was happy about that idea. However, his isolation continued even after the incident.

The second reason for Tom's survival was the chaos occurring throughout Hogwarts starting in the second week of classes. Three new towers had been added to the school. The addition to the school also added new classrooms and expanded the dungeons. The additions occurred in the middle of the night with no warning to the students. (Dumbledore in particular seemed to find their surprise amusing.)

Soon after the new towers appeared, a total of 200 Polish students and some of their teachers appeared. Since they did not use the House system at their school, the students were placed into one tower and declared a temporary House. Temporary Houses had never been done before but the School Governors and the Heads of Houses all agreed on the idea.

The Gdansk House was integrated into the school's regular schedule. Charms were placed in the classrooms to allow the students to hear the professors speak in their native language. The DADA, Potions and Magical Arts professors from the Polish school joined the Hogwarts staff. The DADA and Potions professors shared classes with their Hogwarts counterparts. The Magical Art class did not exist on the Hogwarts schedule. Gdansk students continued if they were already enrolled. Hogwarts students could take it as an elective if it fit their schedule.

Tom enjoyed the new students. He also signed up for the Arts class. He enjoyed the class but the students were the key item. The Polish students did not know of his shunned Slytherin status. He was a strange Englishman but the school was filled with them so what was one more?

The 29th of September was a Sunday night. Tom and Nott opted to eat in the kitchen with the House-elves. The boys enjoyed the antics of the elves as they served the students and staff in the Great Hall above. The elves had grown used to the young wizards appearing in their kitchen for late night snacks or dinner. The boys laughed to hear the elves sharing information about how much each table ate; or the table manners of a particular student.

The highpoint of the night occurred when Tom convinced an elf to spike the staff table's drinks with a potion. The potion would turn their hair a shocking pink and give them a pig nose.

Nott laughed after the elf took the potion. "Maybe after you get expelled you can go to your Dad's school."

Tom snorted, "What are they going to do? Not talk to me? Take House points?"

After dinner, Tom went to his dorm room and closed his curtains. As he passed through the common room, he heard at least three students, including Dolohov, try to take credit for the prank on the staff.

'At least they will have a really hard time tracing it to me.' Tom thought. 'Too many students are trying to take credit for it.'

As curfew approached, Tom heard the other boys in his room return for bed. Tom closed his Transfiguration text and rolled over to get some sleep.

His eyes had just seemed to close when a loud alarm sounded in the dorm room. Tom snapped awake and looked around in surprise. "Is this a prank?' Tom wondered.

Picking up his wand from the nightstand, Tom walked over to the dorm door and tried to open it. It was locked. Tom hissed to the door to open but the snake guardian refused to answer.

The other boys were up and looking as confused as Tom felt. Tom started to realize this was not a prank. Only the school wards could prevent a Parseltongue from opening a door in the Slytherin dorms.

Tom doubted Dippet would allow the ward to be used in revenge for a minor prank. (Although Dumbledore might Tom conceded.)

“Does anyone know what is going on?” Tom asked.

The other boys all started speculating on top of each other. The panic fed on themselves as they went on.

Tom did not know what to do next. Then he realized his mirror! Opening his trunk, Tom pulled out the magical communications mirror his father gave him. Tom cast a Silenceo around himself and activated his mirror.

“Dad!” he called. “Dad!” He called several more times before a very groggy looking James Evans appeared in the mirror. Tom told him what was going on. James told him to barricade the door and he would be there soon.

Tom ended the spell and told Nott, “We need to barricade the door. If something is happening we don’t want to let anyone in.”

Dolohov sneered, “Shut up, Evans. You don’t have any say here.” The larger boy shoved Tom back out of the way.

A loud slamming noise came from outside the room. The dorm room seemed to shake. Screams could be heard coming from the direction of the common room. The Second year boys backed up from their door.

A thud was heard against their door. The door seemed to bend and flex for a moment. Then it flew open.

Two wizards walked through the door with their wands drawn. Both wore the robes of the Dark Army. The Slytherin boys backed behind their beds in fear and confusion. These men served a Dark Lord. Shouldn’t that make them allies? The looks on the wizard’s faces said they did not see the boys as allies though.

Their first act soundly stated where the Dark Army stood. The first wizard through the door cast a silent curse at Mulciber. The boy grabbed his head and screamed, clawing at his face.

His partner shouted in accented English, "Where is Nott's son? We know he is in here!"

Nott let out a quiet squeak. Tom spoke up, "He is in the infirmary tonight! He crashed his broom today!"

The wizard stepped across the room in two steps and physically threw Tom against the far wall. "Liar! We have been watching the school." The wizard noticed Nott in the corner. "Get out here, whelp!" He grabbed Nott by the collar and dragged him out of the room.

The first wizard grabbed Tom, saying, "We have a place for heroes too!"

Tom and Nott were dragged up the stairs into the common room. Professors Slughorn and Merrythought lay on the ground just inside the common room door. Four more wizards stood in the room waiting for them. Three of them watched the open door. The fourth, a dirty looking wizard stood off to the side.

A short, broad wizard watching the door glanced over his shoulder to ask, "Did you get him?"

"Ya, Spellfuhrer! We also found a little hero. Hans wants to play with him."

Before the leader could respond the dirty looking wizard hissed, *Stupid little wizards! Think you are good enough to be in my House! I am the Heir of Slytherin! None of you are above me!*

Tom started thinking about several terms his mother would punish him for even knowing. Could this get any worse? His insane Gaunt uncle was assisting the Dark Army assault Hogwarts.

"In English please, Herr Gaunt. Unless you speak German, of course." the Spellfuhrer said in a dry voice. Morfin Gaunt sneer at the German wizard but remained silent. The short wizard turned to where the two boys were being held. He looked at Nott, "Edward Nott, I presume." He turned to Tom and asked, "And who might you be?"

Suppressing his fear, Tom answered in a calm voice, "Tom Evans, Slytherin outcast"

The German wizard chuckled. "You have spirit. I like that." Then he pulled out his wand and Tom suddenly found himself frozen and floating above the floor. Tom floated up and against the wall. The spell seemed to stick him against the wall.

"What do you want with us?" Tom asked. A part of his mind was telling him he should be scared to death right now. Dark Wizards magically held him against the wall and Tom only felt mad.

Gaunt yelled, "We are here to return the House of Slytherin to greatness! The Dark Lord Grindelwald has promised to pick up in his great work!"

Tom couldn't help it. He sneered at his mad uncle. "Grindelwald was a Ravenclaw you idiot."

The Spellfuhrer looked suddenly nervous at that comment. Gaunt did not notice in his anger. "Never! He seeks to continue the great Slytherin's work!"

Tom looked at the German leader. "Where did you pick up this sucker?"

The watching German wizards looked amused at Tom's comment and impressed by his calm demeanor. Nott looked panicked but was trying to follow his best mate's lead.

Before the verbal match could continue, a small alarm sounded in the room. One of the wizards whispered, "Someone is coming down the hall. It is not one of ours or the ward would not have sounded."

The wizard holding Nott cast the same spell used on Tom and placed him next to Tom on the wall. The remaining Germans and Gaunt pulled their wands and faced the door.

Tom yelled, "Look out!" only to receive a Silencing Charm and a Stinging Hex for his troubles.

Snuffles rounded the corner and ran at the wizards. A large wolf followed close on his heels. Tom wanted to shout for joy at the sight.

Snuffles slammed into the surprised wizards. He knocked one out of the way and snapped at the hamstring of another. Snuffles was hit by a Stunner but it only seemed to make him pause for a moment.

The wolf dashed into the room and launched itself at the first wizard he saw. In midair, the wolf changed into a robed Unspeakable. The Unspeakable slammed into wizard while casting a silent curse. The two wizards dropped to the ground but only the Unspeakable got up.

In the first three seconds of the fight, one Dark Army wizard was down for the fight and two others were dealing with a very angry and very large dog. The remaining two Dark Army wizards and Gaunt faced the Unspeakable rolling to his feet.

Tom tried to scream to his father to watch out, but no sound came out. The forbidding robed figure never seemed to even glance in his direction.

The Unspeakable cast another silent spell at the Spellfuhrer as the one identified as Hans launched a Killing Curse at the Unspeakable.

What followed was like nothing Tom ever imagined. He knew his father trained hard but this was incredible.

The spells flew fast and furious. The Unspeakable almost never cast a shield, preferring to dodge the spells he could. Hans died from the shrapnel of an exploded vase. The vase appeared in the path of a second Killing Curse causing it to detonate only a foot in front of Han's wand.

A bloody scream from one of the wizard fighting Snuffles was heard. Tom's head snapped over to see the wizard go down with his hands around his leg. Snuffles was not even close. Then Tom spotted Nagini slithering back under a nearby overturned couch. The cobra had struck from the shadows. Snuffles moved to remove his last remaining opponent.

Tom turned at the sound of hissing. It was his uncle.

I will stop you in the name of Slytherin!

Morfin Gaunt's last expression in life was shock. The Unspeakable turned with a slashing motion of his wand. A whip of magical energy from an unknown spell slashed out and seemed to pass around him with no harmful effects. The insane wizard stopped in shock when nothing seemed to happen. Then an overwhelming feeling of pain shot through his body. He dropped to the floor and seemed to roll around in a crazed fashion.

When he finally came to a stop, the last thing Morfin Gaunt saw was his decapitated body laying on the floor three feet away. Then his vision started to go gray.

"Now that was classy," the Spellfuhrer commented in an admiring tone.

The Unspeakable spoke for the first time in the fight. "I liked it."

"You are the Count, aren't you?"

"Do you people have nothing to do but talk about little old me?" the Unspeakable asked.

The Dark Army wizard snorted, "You must have talked to Christina. She is your biggest fan. You killed her mentor. She says killing you will prove she is the best."

The Unspeakable shrugged, "Okay, she's crazier then I gave her credit for."

His opponent disagreed, "Not crazy, just wants to be the best. She thinks that is you."

"I've had enough fan girls."

Without a warning, the spells started flying again. Neither wizard cast much aloud. Silent and wandless spells were cast back and forth. Both wizards now bleeding for spell damage.

Then the Unspeakable cast a huge fireball directly at the Spellfuhrer. Because of the boys pinned on the wall, the Unspeakable had to be very accurate with his spell work. This fireball would destroy everything within twenty feet when it impacted.

The Spellfuhrer reacted on instinct, diving out of the way. As he rolled to his feet a massive Bludgeoning Curse slammed into the small of his back. His wand flew into the air as he crashed into the wall and slid to the ground. The Unspeakable caught the wandlessly summoned wand in his freehand.

Tom was panting on the wall. Watching the bloody fight in front of him was like something out of a nightmare. Then the fireball. He thought his dad had lost it. He did not understand until the illusion crashed over them with no heat. Then he saw the last remaining German laying in a heap near the wall.

Tom glared at his disguised father. "What took you so long?"

"I had to do it left handed. Otherwise it would have been over too quickly." Then the Unspeakable laughed. "I always wanted to use that line."

Nott fainted.

A/N: Chapter 16 will include the aftermath of the fight at Hogwarts. This chapter took much longer then usually to write due to RL issues and trying to get the fight scene right.

dellacouer has started a thread in my forum on to discuss if (or should) James be able to break the link to the time turner. As I said there, I know where I plan to go, but I may have my opinion change due to a good argument!

I would like to thank ip82 for nominating this story for Best AU on the Darklordpotter web site. After looking at the other stories nominated, thank you for just nominating me. Also thanks to jbern for dropping me a note letting me know.

Chapter 16 – Aftermath

James released the magical bindings on Tom and Nott, lowering them gently to the floor. Nott settled in a boneless heap on the floor. Tom checked on his friend before turning to James and opening his mouth to speak.

Before Tom could say anything, James spoke first, “I am an Unspeakable. You may call me ‘The Count’.”

Tom nodded in understanding. “Are you okay?” he asked.

James shrugged, “Minor injuries mostly. You?”

“I’ll be a little bruised but I am fine. You got here before they could do anything else but stick us to the wall.”

James nodded and stood up. “*Accio* wands.” Ten wands leaped from various points around the room. James deftly caught the wands. He handed Tom his wand and Nott’s. The remaining wands belong to the two professors and their attackers.

“I believe all of the attackers are gone. Can you please go check on your professors?” James asked Tom. Tom ran over to Professor Slughorn to check on him.

James walked over to the collapsed form of the Spellführer. The German wizard was unconscious. James cast a quick medical diagnostic charm on the man. The Bludgeoning Curse impacted in the wizard’s lower back, destroying the lower part of the spine. A large amount of internal injury and bleeding was also indicated. James cast, “*Impedimenta*” on the wizard.

James noticed Tom watching him curiously. “The spell will slow the body processes enough that we have enough time to get him to a Healer. We need him alive,” James explained.

Tom seemed to accept that without comment. “Professor Slughorn was stunned, but otherwise is fine. Professor Merrythought has a bunch of tiny, nasty cuts all over her face and neck. The bleeding seems to have stopped.”

"We will get her help soon." James reassured his son. Tom was holding up well in James opinion but he looked a bit green. This was a lot for a twelve-year-old to handle. "I will wake Professor Slughorn. Why don't you sit with your friend?"

Tom walked over to Nott and sat down heavily against the wall. Snuffles snuggled up against him. Nagini soon slithered up and coiled up in Tom's lap.

James woke Slughorn. It still felt strange seeing the younger version of his former Potions professor. "Professor, are you with me?"

Horace Slughorn groaned as he opened his eyes. "What happened? Did they get any of my students?"

"They were stopped before any of the students were hurt." James answered. "What happened here?"

"I was in my office with Galettea working on a research project. The ward alarms went off. We were on our way to the entrance hall when we found them entering the Slytherin dorm." Slughorn rubbed his head. "How could they have gotten into the dorm?" he asked in a plaintive voice.

With a nod of his head, James indicated where the body of Gaunt lay cooling. "They brought the senior member of Slytherin's line. He could open the portal."

"An heir of Slytherin?" the professor asked. "But the Slytherin line was lost long ago."

"Not lost, just misplaced." James turned the conversation back to the topic. "Professor Merrythought and the two surviving attackers need medical attention. Where are the other professors?"

"They were meeting in the staff conference room to discuss the additional students and preparing for any other new students from the continent."

Their conversation ended when six Aurors in red robes ran into the common room with their wands drawn. Seeing the Unspeakable

crouched next to the professor sitting on the floor, the Aurors relaxed slightly.”

“Status?” James snapped.

“Four Auror squads are covering Hogwarts. A medi-wizard team is on the way. Each House is being checked by a squad,” the squad leader answered. “Are you secured here, sir?”

“The students are safe. Six attackers down with four fatalities and two needing medical help. Professor Merrythought also needs help. Outside the Headmaster’s office are three more bodies. One Dark Army witch escaped.”

Another Auror seemed to listen for a moment and said, “None of the other dorms have been attacked.”

James nodded. That made sense. Grindelwald’s wizards had a specific target in the Slytherin dorm. Minister of Magic Nott’s son would have made a valuable hostage. “Have them look in the staff conference room for the rest of the staff,” James ordered. “Get the professor and the two surviving attackers up to the Hospital Wing.”

As the Aurors ran off to carry out their orders and Professor Slughorn left to settle the Slytherin students, James turned and looked at his son and his friend. Tom looked a little shocky now that the crisis was over. James wanted to run over and comfort him but the Count could not do that. Snuffles and Nagini would have to provide the comfort they could until the Count could leave and James Evans could arrive.

The school’s professors and support staff was found sleeping in the staff room. It was found the teapot was charmed to mix a tasteless Sleeping Potion into the tea. The potion was charmed into the ceramics of the pot allowing the user to spike their own tea. The potion did not take effect until one hour after drinking, ensuring that no one noticed anything that would prevent them from drinking. All of the staff was taken to the Hospital Wing to be checked out.

James used the Marauders’ Map to quickly check the school for any sign of remaining Dark Army forces. Instead, he found students sneaking out of their dorm. ‘I should have known,’ he thought

The Count seemed to suddenly appear in front of the Gryffindors. "I believe you were told to remain in your dorms," he said in a dry voice.

The Gryffindors jumped at the Unspeakable's sudden appearance. It appeared to be a fairly mixed group of eight students and various years. All of them already had their wands drawn.

"We want to know what is going on!" a red haired Sixth year said back.

Before James could answer, the Sixth year received support from a fellow student. "Just because we are kids doesn't mean we shouldn't be told what is going on!" The Third year girl glared at James with her hands on her hips.

James almost choked on the irony in this situation. Inside his hood, James smiled at the dark haired Scottish girl. "You must return to your dorm, Miss McGonagall. We will tell the entire student body what happened during breakfast. For right now, you must return to your dorm."

The students looked shocked when James called Minerva by name. Getting to discipline his former (future?) Head of House made James laugh to himself. James could see the iron will he knew as a student but she also had a rebellious glint in her eye that spoke of someone willing to fight for what she believed in. James felt a sudden pang as he thought of Hermione. Apparently Hermione had chosen her role model well.

James kept the humor he found in the situation out of his voice. "I am quite surprised to find Gryffindor students out of their dorm in this situation. It was most irresponsible of you." Now the students looked guilty. "The Aurors have enough on their plates tonight without chasing students. Go back to your dorm. I will be watching." Then he disillusioned himself.

The Gryffindors were true to their House. They valued bravery and courage. Yet having an Unspeakable suddenly appear in front of you and then disappear again was highly unnerving. The Gryffindors went back to their dorm.

Two hours after the fighting ended, James walked into the Hospital Wing. The Aurors had completed their sweep of Hogwarts and the school grounds. Although James could have told them it would have meant explaining the map. It was a good exercise anyway.

A medical team from the Ministry and St. Mungos arrived to assist in the recovery of the Hogwarts staff. The Hogwarts nurse was included in the staff meeting and among the victims. James noticed a blond Healer witch among the response team.

Sarah was checking on Albus when James walked in. He walked over to the side of the professor's bed. Sarah recognized James but understood the rules the Unspeakables worked under. She also did not want their family to become a target.

"How are they?"

Sarah smiled slightly, "The potion was a simple Sleeping Potion. No side effects we can find."

That was good news. "And our guests?"

Now a frown came to her face. She knew they were caught while holding her son hostage. "We lost the one due to systemic failure. The other was hurt worse but I think he will make it. He will probably never work again. His spine shattered severing his spinal cord. Nerve Regeneration Potions do not work well on the spinal cord."

"How is your son?" James had not seen Tom since not long after the fighting ended.

Sarah kept her 'professional' face on but James could see the concern in her eyes. "I gave Tom and Edward each a Dreamless Sleep Potion. Both of them seemed to be in coming out of their shock but I wanted them to get a good night's sleep before they had to face anything."

"Thank you for that," a new voice said. James turned to find the Minister standing a couple of feet behind him. The Minister asked, "My son is safe?"

“Yes, Minister,” James answered. “Your son and Mr. Evans were briefly taken by Grindelwald’s wizards but were unharmed.”

Sarah had turned to check Dumbledore again but added, “Thank Merlin for that.”

“Minister, may I introduce Mrs. Evans, Tom’s mother.”

The Minister nodded politely at the Healer. “Thank you for looking after my son.” He added James in his glance. “Both of you, thank you.”

“You have a very fine son, Minister,” Sarah replied. “We had fun during his visits over the holidays.”

“I know he enjoyed himself with Tom.” The Minister turned to James. “Count, I would like a full debrief in fifteen minutes. We will meet in the Headmaster’s office. Professor Dippet, Thomas Potter, and Head Auror Abbot will be joining us.” After James nodded his agreement, the Minister left to talk with some of the other people in the room.

Sarah and James parted with a subtle glance. Anything else would have to wait until they were safely at home.

Professor Dippet looked weak as he settled into the chair behind his desk. He received a smaller dosage of the Sleeping Potion because he spent most of the meeting talking to his staff, rather than drinking the tea.

James did not personally care much for Armando Dippet. The former Herbology professor seemed a non-entity. He seemed to lack any strong convictions. The course of least resistance was always his preferred decision. Dumbledore may have made some dumb decisions in the raising of Harry and dealing with the original Tom Riddle, but even his critics would admit he was willing to stand up for his beliefs. Dippet was a nice wizard. James mentally compared him to a First year Neville Longbottom but without Neville’s willingness to stand up for what he believed to be right. James smiled briefly remembering the confrontation in the Gryffindor Common Room on the way to the Philosopher’s Stone.

James snorted quietly to himself. Even the decisions for the original timeline's Tom Riddle could be laid at Dippet's feet. In Harry's history, Dumbledore became Headmaster only several years after Tom left school.

Head Auror Anthony Abbot settled into his chair with a grim expression on his face. Three Aurors died during the Dark Army attack. Two apparently died never knowing they were under attack. Neither Auror was ever able to draw their wand. The third Auror was found in an alcove near the Headmaster's office. He apparently dragged himself there after a fight and died of internal injuries. The Auror fought the wizards attacking the Headmaster's office. It had been the sounds of his fighting James heard as he entered the school.

Thomas Potter and the Minister entered together. Both wizards seemed shocked by the events of the past few hours.

The Minister started the meeting. "I want to hear the details of what happened here tonight."

Professor Dippet frowned, "We were having our monthly staff meeting. Professor Flitwick collapsed onto the floor. When we went to check on him, the rest of us started to drop also. I knew nothing again until the Hospital Wing."

James nodded, "Professor Flitwick has the smallest body mass of the staff. It makes sense he would be affected first."

"Why were the Potions and DADA professors not in the meeting?" Abbot asked.

"They had an experiment brewing and it was a critical point. I excused them from the meeting."

"All of the new Polish professors were in the meeting?" the Auror asked.

Dippet nodded, "Yes. Do you think one of them could have been involved?"

"We know the charmed teapot had to have been placed in the staff conference room today. Obviously staff members have the greatest access and no one would question them. We do not know the new Polish staff members too well yet." Abbot replied with a shrug. "I suspect everyone right now." James approved of his attitude.

"How would they have gotten past the school wards?" Mr. Potter asked.

Dippet looked at James. "I am curious about that as well. Count, you led a project a couple years ago to upgrade our wards. How did they get in?" Everyone's attention turned to James.

James shrugged, "I have not yet been able to do a full analysis but I do have a strong theory." The Headmaster nodded and James continued. "The Hogwarts wards were designed by the Founders. The wards have been strengthened over time and others applied, but the original wards still form the foundation all of the magic is built on. The Founders never meant the wards to keep the Founders themselves out. It was only after Salazar Slytherin went Dark that the wards were adjusted to keep him out."

"The important thing is the wards effected everyone except the Founders, and later their heirs. The Founders and their senior heirs had to be specifically locked out individually. Slytherin and his heirs were locked out at birth. The practice stopped when the line seemed to die out." Knowing the true history of Tom, Thomas started to look uneasy.

"Are you saying an heir let them in?" Dippet asked.

"One of the men holding the Minister's son was named Morfin Gaunt. A direct descendant of Slytherin via his only daughter, Gaunt must have been the one to let them in and open the Slytherin Common Room."

The Minister glared at James. "You knew this man was a threat?!"

James shook his head negative. "Morfin Gaunt spent a number of years on Azkaban for assaulting Muggles. When he was released, he lived in a shack as a hermit. In June of '38 he was sent to a Muggle

prison for assaulting more Muggles. It was reported he died soon after arriving during a riot he started. We had no reason to be concerned with him in particular.”

“Do we know who all the heirs are?” Abbot asked.

“Some of them. The senior Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw heirs are not known. Their line has spread through almost all of the Pureblood lines over the last thousand years. The primary direct line died out in both cases. Who knows who the senior line is now?”

“What about Gryffindor and Slytherin?” Professor Dippet asked.

“I believe I know who the Gryffindor senior heir is. The Gryffindor name passed out of existence about four hundred years ago. The only daughter of the last Gryffindor married Augustus Longbottom. That would make Zebedee Longbottom the current Heir. I have never been able to test it but that is who it should be based on the public records.” The others in the room looked surprised at the news of the Longbottom clan.

James chuckled to himself. Although Frank Longbottom was still alive while Harry and Neville were at school, Neville would have been the Heir on his father’s death. The irony was Frank Longbottom, locked in St. Mungos for almost seventeen years, outlived his son. Neville would have been stunned if he found out he was Gryffindor’s Heir.

James continued. “The new senior heir of Slytherin is the only one left of his line. The line kept their bloodline close, often marrying siblings or cousins. The family declined. Morfin Gaunt had one sister who died after giving birth to her only son. Their father died years ago in Azkaban. The mother died several years prior. With Morfin gone, he is the only remaining Slytherin Heir, senior or otherwise.”

Only Thomas Potter definitely knew whom James was referring to. The Minister had a very good idea. James could see a degree of calculation on the politician’s face. Most of it was hidden, but James spent a lot of time learning to read people. Knowing who to trust and reading people is what kept you alive in James’s world. Most people would probably have missed the calculation, but not James.

The Minister knew, as James suspected, whom the Unspeakable referred to in his comments. If the Evans boy was the last Heir of Slytherin, it could explain why the Count adopted the orphan in the first place.

An Heir of Slytherin, that could be a huge advantage with many of the older Pureblood houses. It would have to be done quietly. The mob would not understand the value of a Slytherin. But among the elite... they would be impressed if the Nott family had the last Heir of Salazar Slytherin as an ally.

The Minister felt someone watching him. He looked up to find the Unspeakable across from him staring directly at him. It couldn't properly be called staring since no face could be seen under the Unspeakable hood. But Theodore Nott could feel the force behind the gaze and the magic of the wizard in front of him. It must have been a trick of his imagination, but the Minister imagined he could see green orbs glowing where the wizard's eyes would be.

Theodore Nott saw himself as a brave and cunning wizard. However something about the wizard in front of him unnerved him greatly. James Evans was reported to be a gentle and polite wizard. Much of Pureblood society looked down on him for his concerns for the "lesser" wizards and witches. They looked even further down for his assistance of squibs. Some old rumors indicated he was a powerful wizard and an excellent dueler. The consensus among the Purebloods now was he was near a squib himself.

The Count was one of the most feared wizards in the Ministry. Virtually unknown outside the Ministry, within it the Count's reputation for violence and surviving was the stuff of many hushed whispers.

Feeling the gaze and magic now, the Minister felt a tremor of fear. Theodore Nott realized that any attempt to use Tom Evans would be forced to deal with the wizard in front of him. James Evans would never support an effort to use his son's heritage for political benefit. Nott briefly thought about using political means of removing James Evans as the boy's guardian. A small voice in his head stopped that line of thought. The Count would not fight the Minister in the

backroom and legal battlefields. Rather, he would make them real battlefields.

The Minister subtly shook his head. He wanted to let the Count know he would not interfere with the Slytherin Heir. He felt relief as the Count gave a small nod in reply, his message understood.

The Minister felt a shiver of relief as the Count's gaze moved away from him.

James turned from the Minister. He knew the Minister understood his message. Minister Nott was much better than the Fudge, but he was still a politician. The breed was worse than Voldemort in some ways.

"Count, how did you know there was a problem here tonight?" Abbot asked.

"I received a tip from a source that an attack was underway. I arrived and found one of the Aurors dead. That confirmed the tip." James then went on to give the details of his fight with the Dark Army forces.

Abbot was taking notes as he listened to James's story. "Where did the dog come in?"

Headmaster Dippet answered, "Snuffles is Mr. Evans's dog. Since they live in Hogsmeade, the dog often wanders the school grounds looking for his master. He must have sensed the danger to Mr. Evans." The Headmaster frowned absently, "I wonder if the dog could be a bonded familiar."

James continued with his story of the fight outside the Headmaster's office, the talk with Christina and the fight in the Slytherin Common Room. The room listened in stunned disbelief as James talked about fighting the Dark Army Wizards.

"Why did you let the witch go?" Abbot asked.

James shrugged, "She made a magically binding oath to return to Germany. She was no longer a threat. She offered the information on the group looking for Mr. Nott. Capturing her was not as important as protecting the students."

A knock on the door stopped the questioning. After a moment, the door opened and Alistor Moody walked in. "Professor Czetwertynski is missing. He was released from the Hospital Wing an hour ago. He has not been seen since."

At the questioning glances from the Ministry workers in the room, the Headmaster supplied, "Professor Czetwertynski was the DADA professor from Gdansk."

"All of his things were left in his room, including his personal items," Moody added.

Nott frowned, "Could he have been the one to place the charmed teapot in the staff room?"

"Possible," Moody allowed. "But if he knew he was going to run afterwards why not take his belongings too? If he did place the teapot, I don't think it was as a willing accomplice."

"Have you talked to the other two Polish professors?" James asked.

"No, they returned to their rooms after leaving the Hospital Wing. We verified they are still in their rooms sleeping it off," Moody replied.

"I want to talk to them before breakfast in the morning." Moody nodded his agreement. James turned to the Headmaster, "We will have to make an announcement at breakfast. The Slytherin students know a fight occurred with outside forces in their common room. The rest of the school knows something happened. I already caught a group of Gryffindors sneaking around looking for information."

The Headmaster nodded, "Yes, the students must be told. Otherwise the school will all of its time speculating. Should we keep Mr. Nott and Mr. Evans out of the story?"

"Their dorm mates already know they were taken from the room. It won't take a rocket scientist to figure out Mr. Nott was the target. We will have to tell them some of it." James answered absently. The loss of Gaunt meant the school should be safe now, but how to ensure it?

"Excuse me, what is a wocket?" the Minister asked.

The next morning, James and Moody were sitting in the staff room drinking their morning tea. Both men had been up much of the night and looked forward to getting some sleep. Before they could leave, they needed to question the two remaining Polish professors.

The door opened to admit two people. The first was a tall, young wizard with an indefinable aura. It reminded James of Luna. His robes would have done Dumbledore proud. They were a brilliant lime green with orange balls moving about in random patterns. Professor Aleksander Opaliński taught classes on the Magical Arts.

The Magical Arts was a class not taught at Hogwarts. It dealt with the use of magic in the creation of various art works, such as paintings, sculptures and the like. The ceiling of the Great Hall was one example of the Magical Arts. Only a skilled Magical Artist could create the magically animated portraits that filled the Hogwarts halls. Professor Opaliński specialized in the creation of magical sculptures. Although skilled at the other Magical Arts, the young wizard was considered one of Europe's foremost sculptors.

The witch accompanying him was a polar opposite. The small, neat, middle-aged witch was immaculately dressed in the latest magical fashions. She had a no-nonsense expression on her face but James noticed a glint of humor in her eye. Professor Anna Czartoryska served as the Potions Mistress of Gdansk for over thirty years. James found it ironic her masterwork was the creation of the Draught of Living Death. James found it funny that one of Snape's first questions to Harry Potter was about the creation of the witch standing in front of him.

The two professors came to a stop on the other side of the table from James and Moody.

"Good morning, professors. I hope you have recovered from last night's misadventure?" James asked politely.

"Yes, thank you. I understand you have questions for us?" the witch replied.

"I am Auror Moody. This is the Count. We have some questions about Professor Czetwertynski," Moody grunted. "How well did you know the professor?"

"Did something happen to Juliusz?" the Potions Mistress asked.

"That is what we would like to find out."

"Czetwertynski is so dull," the Polish wizard said in a aloof tone. "He had no appreciation for the finer things. He was only concerned with fighting and honor."

Professor Czartoryska gave her fellow professor a flat glance. "Juliusz is a retired Auror. He pushed our Ministry to prepare itself for the war. Actually he was more afraid of the USSR then the Dark Army and the Nazis."

"Do you think he had any sympathy for the Grindelwald's agenda, professor?" James asked.

The witch frowned in thought. "Before last night I would have said absolutely not. Now? I am not so sure."

Professor Opaliński sighed dramatically, "Dear Juliusz only cared for defending magical Poland. He refused to be diverted from the topic. It made him a dreadful bore. Something about his family history, poor man."

James found the art professor to be highly annoying. He reminded James of his former Divination professor. From the expression on Professor Czartoryska's face, James was not the only one. James found the Potions Mistress's manner to be very professional. Working with many teachers with the Phoenix Foundation, James sensed she was a devoted and highly competent teacher in addition to her potions skill.

'What an experience it must be to have a good teacher for potions,' James thought to himself. Slughorn was not the vile creature Snape was, but he was more concerned with establishing his political connections than properly teaching his students. James wondered if he could get Tom into her class.

It soon became clear that neither professor had anything substantial to offer on the disappearance of their colleague. James and Moody thanked them for their time and let them go to breakfast.

Before leaving the room, Professor Czartoryska stopped and faced them. "If Juliusz had anything to do with last night, it would not be by his choice. He would never have anything to do with endangering students." Then she left without a word closing the door behind her.

Once the door closed, Moody said, "Nothing useful there. What's next on your end?"

"I want to talk to the Dark Army Spellfuhrer when he wakes up. Until then I am going to go find a bed."

Moody grunted, "Lucky you. The Minister wants a full report by noon on the investigation. He wants us to track down your lady friend."

James snorted, "Fifty galleons she is already in Berlin. But don't worry. We haven't seen the last of her."

Moody stood to walk out of the room. "The scary thing is it sounds like you are looking forward to it."

After Moody left, James realized he was.

Tom woke up when Madam O'Neil came by to check on him. The hospital matron was a jolly older witch. The students loved her as she mothered them all but not too much. Professor Dumbledore might have been the most respected faculty member for magic use, but the student body lived in fear of disappointing the medi-witch.

Tom had overheard his parents talking about Madam O'Neil on night. Sarah Evans trained under the school's nurse for a while. She became indignant when Dad insisted it was the medi-witch's manner was an act to get the students to stay put in the Hospital Wing and take their potions without fighting her. Mum had given Dad an earful for his comment. Tom had laughed at his father's error in triggering his wife's temper.

Now Tom was sure his father was correct. Tom had avoided the Hospital Wing all of his First year. Except for his time at St. Mungos when Dad had saved him, Tom managed to avoid needing medical attention for the most part. Although Tom was not injured during the fight in the Slytherin dorms, the medi-witch poured a number of vile tasting potions down his throat. When he tried to protest the first one, she gave him a look of such profound disappointment, that Tom could not bring himself to protest again.

“Good morning, Mr. Evans. How are you feeling?” Madam O’Neil asked.

Tom smiled and kept his desire to run out of the Hospital Wing off his face. “I am fine, thank you. May I go down to breakfast?”

“We shall see,” she answered noncommittally. The next ten minutes Tom suffered in silence as he was poked, prodded and charmed to verify he was not in fact dying and could be released. Finally the witch nodded, “Very well, Mr. Evans. You may go. I believe your mother was just about to release Mr. Nott also. You may go down together.”

Tom gave her a big smile as he jumped out of bed. “Thank you!”

He almost made it out of the room before another voice stopped him. “Are you going somewhere, Tom.”

Tom slid to a halt and turned to face his mother. She was wearing her “working face” as Dad called it. “I have not given you permission to leave, young man.”

‘It’s not fair!’ Tom cried in his head. ‘They are double-teaming me!’

Sarah’s demeanor cracked and she smiled, “You can’t leave until you at least say good morning to me.”

Tom hugged his mother (after first checking if anyone was watching) and said, “Dad is a very bad influence on you.”

“How do you know I am not a bad influence on him?” she murmured into his ear. Then she pushed him back. “Get down to breakfast. Your friend is waiting for you in the hall.”

“Thanks, Mum!” James called as he ran out of the room. Nott joined him as the two boys ran for their dorm before anyone could call them back.

The trip to the Slytherin dorms took only a few minutes. The two boys knew the secret passages and back ways of Hogwarts to shorten the trip. The dorm was empty when they arrived in their room. The damage from the previous night was already repaired. In a short time, the boys changed their clothes and cleaned up for breakfast.

They arrived in the Great Hall to find it unusually filled. Breakfast usually was served as the students arrived, rather than all together like lunch and dinner. The students seemed to be waiting on something before they began eating. The Hall had expanded to accommodate the new Polish students. A fifth table was added between the Slytherin and Gryffindor tables. Tom thought it was a good idea just to keep the two Houses separated.

When the Great Hall doors opened, Tom felt the attention of the room focus on him and his companion. Trying not to appear self-conscious, Tom walked with Nott to their normal places at the Slytherin table.

As they approached the table, the whispering stopped. Tom and Nott shared a glance as they slid into their seats. Although Nott offered a couple of greetings, Tom remained silent. Remembering their isolation of him, none of the Slytherins attempted to speak with Tom.

Three minutes after they arrived in the Hall, Headmaster Dippet and the staff walked to their table together. The professors all sat while the Headmaster remained standing.

After he was sure he had everyone’s attention, the headmaster spoke, “Last night we had a most unfortunate occurrence. Forces of the Dark Lord Grindelwald sought access to our school. They were stopped by a response from the Ministry. You are all safe. There is no cause for alarm. Enjoy your breakfast.” Then he started to sit down.

A young wizard at the Ravenclaw table stood before the headmaster managed to sit down. "Headmaster, what was the Dark Army looking for and why did they attack the Slytherin dorm?"

The Headmaster stood and smiled gently, "I understand your curiosity, Mr. Burke. However, I am afraid I will not be able to answer your questions. And I ask they you leave do not ask questions of those involved either." Then he sat down.

Tom wanted to scream. Either the headmaster was a Slytherin and wanted the entire school to question Tom and Nott, or he was the world's biggest naive fool. Tom was sure it was the later. His comments painted an arrow on the two boys. Tom groaned. From tablemates' expressions, Tom knew the interrogations were just about to start.

Mary started the questioning by simply asking if the boys were okay. "We heard from Evan about you being pulled out of the dorm. Are you okay?"

Tom never answered her as her question unleashed a flood of questions from all around him. Tom put his head down and refused to provide them with any information. They had just spent the last few weeks ignoring him. He was not willing to forget that. Tom reminded himself this was not their accepting him back into their company. They only wanted his information.

Nott did not feel Tom's reluctance. He gave an exciting account to everyone listening about the fight in the Slytherin Common Room. "The Unspeakable was so amazing! It was like he was dancing! I have never seen someone fight like that. Dad has taken me to the Auror Academy to watch their dueling and he was so much better then them. I've never even heard of some of the spells he cast. Some of them were wordless!"

Tom admitted Nott was an excellent storyteller. The entire Slytherin table had fallen silent to listen to his tale. A glance at the Gdansk table confirmed that at least that table was also straining to hear.

“One of the Dark wizards claimed he was here to restore the Slytherin name!” Nott said loudly. “The Unspeakable used a spell that sliced his head right off his neck. It looked like it just slid through him!”

“A Slytherin heir?” Dolohov asked in slightly mocking tone. “The Slytherins all died out a long time ago. He was insane.”

Tom spoke for the first time. “Actually what he said was, ‘We are here to return the House of Slytherin to greatness! The Dark Lord Grindelwald has promised to pick up in his great work!’”

Nott grinned at his friend. “Tom started mocking him. He told him that Grindelwald was a Ravenclaw. He went spare.” Nott glanced around, “He actually was, you know. I asked my father.”

Mary and, surprisingly, Xurana glared at Tom for taking the risk of mocking a wizard when he was being held captive. Tom gave a shrug and smiled sheepishly before looking back down at the table.

“How did Tom get involved anyhow?” Xurana asked. “Evan didn’t say.”

Nott grinned again. “He got too much Gryffindor from his father. He tried to help me when they broke into our room. No one else helped.” Contrary to the grin on his face, his eyes promised that would not be forgotten as he glanced at his other dorm mates.

The excitement spread to all of the listeners. Tom heard the jealous whispers as they talked amongst themselves. The most common comment seemed to be a desire to learn to fight like the Unspeakable did. Tom smirked to himself, ‘Keep wishing. My father is going to be teaching me!’

Tom quickly finished his breakfast and slipped out of the hall. Most of the students were too wrapped up in their discussion of the night’s events to notice his departure. Only a couple of concerned watchers saw him leave.

With no real destination in mind, Tom walked randomly through the school. Then a voice stopped him.

“Tom”

Tom stopped and glanced around. No one was in sight. Then a figure appeared from within a shadowed alcove.

James Evans stepped out of the shadow. His Unspeakable cloak gone, he was dressed in his typical comfortable Muggle clothes. “I couldn’t leave until I saw if you were okay.”

Tom threw himself at James, “Dad, I was so glad when you showed up. I was terrified.”

James embraced his eldest son. “You did wonderfully. You kept them distracted long enough for me to get here. You showed real courage and kept your head.”

“But I was so scared.”

James chuckled. “I am always scared when I get into those situations. Do you know what makes someone what others call a hero?” Tom shook his head. “It is the ability to keep your head about you when it falls into the pot. You thought to use the mirror. You kept your friend safe until help could come. I am very proud of you.”

Tom smiled at his father’s praise. It made him feel a bit better. He glanced around to make sure no one was near.

James noticed his glance and smiled. “Relax; I used a privacy charm before I stepped out of the shadow.”

Tom gave his father an innocent look. “You know Nott is telling everyone about your fight in exhaustive detail.” Then he smiled, “They all want lessons with you.”

James groaned to his son’s amusement. “Thank Merlin I remembered to grab my cloak on the way out of the house.” James glanced at his son. “I am sorry I did not check up on that report on Morfin. Apparently, the riot was staged for his escape. I suspect the body was a polyjuiced replacement.”

Tom frowned, "I was scared he would recognize me. I think his mind was so far gone he would have killed me in an instant if he had recognized me." James frowned at Tom's comment.

"Dad, could you train me to fight?" Tom asked.

"Why?" came the blunt question.

"I know you don't want me in danger, dad, but I think it is going to happen anyway. It is not something to do with your job, it will be something because of Nott or the Slytherin name. I can't be safe. I need to be able to defend myself. Professor Merrythought is an okay teacher but she doesn't know the stuff you do."

James grimaced half way through Tom's pitch. Now that the Minister knew Tom was the Slytherin Heir, it was likely the word would get out. James told Tom about the Minister figuring out who Tom was.

Tom thought briefly on what that would mean to his friendship with the younger Nott and the rest of his House. Then he put it aside. "That makes it more important I can defend myself."

In the end, James agreed. "We can start when you are home for the winter holidays and continue during the summer holidays." Then James warned, "I will be your teacher, not your father. I will work you hard."

Tom grinned, "Thanks, Dad!" Then he ran off down the hall feeling excited and relieved.

James watched him go. James loved Tom, he had no doubt of that. But the memories of Voldemort lurked in the back of his mind. A Voldemort trained to fight from an early age by his archenemy caused James to mentally wince. The Sorting Hat's warning about the flow of time remained in James's head.

In the end, James decided he would have to have faith in his son. He would have to fortify this Tom to resist the pull of the Dark. The Hat warned that certain things in the future occur in some form no matter what James did. James would ensure Tom and his children were

prepared for were fully prepared to survive not only the current storm, but the bigger storm to come.

James dropped his privacy charm. An instant later, a black bat fluttered down the hall. No sound of its passing disturbed the halls as James made his way home.

A/N: WWII Timeline Information 1940

1940

March 16, 1940 - Germans bomb Scapa Flow naval base near Scotland.

May 10, 1940 - Nazis invade France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands; Winston Churchill becomes British Prime Minister.

May 15, 1940 - Holland surrenders

May 26, 1940 – Dunkirk Evacuation begins.

May 28, 1940 - Belgium surrenders.

June 3, 1940 - Germans bomb Paris; Dunkirk evacuation ends.

June 10, 1940 - Norway surrenders; Italy declares war on Britain and France.

June 14, 1940 - Germans enter Paris.

June 16, 1940 - Marshal Pétain becomes French Prime Minister.

June 22, 1940 - France signs an armistice with the Nazis.

June 23, 1940 - Hitler tours Paris.

June 28, 1940 - Britain recognizes Gen. Charles de Gaulle as the Free French leader.

July 1, 1940 - German U-boats attack merchant ships in the Atlantic.

July 10, 1940 - Battle of Britain begins.

Aug 17, 1940 - Hitler declares a blockade of the British Isles.

Aug 23/24 - First German air raids on Central London.

Aug 25/26 - First British air raid on Berlin.

Sept 3, 1940 - Hitler plans Operation Sealion (the invasion of Britain).

Sept 7, 1940 - German Blitz against England begins.

Oct 12, 1940 - Germans postpone Operation Sealion until Spring of 1941.

Nov 23, 1940 - Romania joins the Axis Powers.

Dec 29/30 - Massive German air raid on London.

The above information came from a selection of TheHistoryPlace(dot)com's WWII timeline. (I can't post the full address here due to the site filters)

Chapter 17 – Second Year

Tom and Nott wandered into their Potions class one week after the attack on Hogwarts. Although Nott initially enjoyed the attention the attack gave him, eventually even he tired of it. Tom never wanted it to begin with. He hated the way people stopped and stared or whispered as he walked past. After the isolation of his first month of school, the strange attention of the last week was ... extremely annoying.

Tom and Nott sat down in the back of the classroom. Professor Czartoryska walked into the room and stood at the front of the class. Professors Slughorn and Czartoryska split the years with the expanded student size. Professor Slughorn taught the First, Third and NEWT level classes. Professor Czartoryska taught Second, Fourth and Fifth years. She also offered classes for Sixth and Seventh year students who missed their E's to enter the NEWT level classes. Tom appreciated not having "Sluggy" this year. He was an okay teacher but Professor Czartoryska was a much better teacher.

The Slytherin girls walked into class and took seats two rows down from Tom and Nott as the boys were setting up their station. All six of the girls avoided looking up at the two boys. Tom wanted to pound his head onto the counter in frustration.

Two of the Polish students slid into the seats next to Tom. Tom had met them briefly in the previous couple of weeks. He knew the boy was named Janek Nowicki and the girl was Ela Zamoyska. The girl sat next to Tom and Janek sat on her other side. Tom nodded a greeting and continued setting up his cauldron.

"Those girls are foolish."

Tom looked up. "Excuse me?"

Ela gestured with a nod. "Your friends, they act very foolishly, no?" Tom nodded. The translation charms cast on the castle rendered each other's speech understandable, but Tom decided he liked her accent. It had an exotic, musical overtone to it.

“They acted like silly girls and are sorry for it, but now don’t know had to say sorry without hurting pride.” The Polish witch smiled, “They are caught in the blood issue. You challenge them.” Nott and Janek stopped their preparations to listen to Ela’s comments.

Tom looked at her, considering her comments. Then he shrugged. “Probably. All of them are old family purebloods. They were raised to be proud of that fact. I just wish they would leave me out of that mess.” The last was said with an unusually vehement tone.

Janek glanced over, “I can understand but why are you so firm?”

“Firm?” Tom asked.

“Er, maybe not right word. I mean with such strong conviction.”

Tom grimaced. “I have personal reasons for wanting to avoid the whole blood issue.”

Ela nodded. “I am a Pureblood. Janek is a half-blood and an oaf...”

Janek interrupted with a protest, “Oi!”

“But he is also my cousin and my best friend,” she continued, ignoring the interruption.

Nott grunted, “Must be a half-blood thing. Tom is an oaf too.”

Tom tried to look insulted, “Hey, no telling the truth about me!” Ela and Janek joined Nott in laughing at Tom’s antics. For the first time in weeks, Tom felt included as a student.

Professor Czartoryska spoke from the front of the room. “Settle down back there. We are starting now. Class open your texts to the Swelling Solution found on page 32...”

Tom smiled at his two new friends then turned forward to listen to Professor Czartoryska. As he did, he noticed Mary turning forward with a sad look on her face.

At lunch, Tom and Nott sat in their usual seats. They had invited Ela and Janek to join them but they declined.

Ela demurred, saying, "Our Prefects want us to eat all of our meals together. They say it will help us keep our identity as a school."

As Tom and Nott started their lunch, Tom felt someone sitting down on either side of him. Glancing to his left, he saw Mary. On the right, he saw Xurana. Tom was stunned they had sat next to him. He wasn't sure how to react. Laura, Alicia and the others filled in around Nott.

Xurana spoke after thirty seconds of silence. "I am sorry, Tom.

Tom didn't respond. He continued to eat his sandwich.

Xurana tried again. "Tom, please say something. I am sorry. I acted horribly. It was just... everything you said was the opposite of what my parents told me, how I was raised." Her voice had a pleading, whining tone to it.

Mary gently placed her hand on Tom's arm. In a soft voice, she said, "We are all sorry, Tom. I was so scared for you when I heard your room had been attacked. I am so sorry we ignored you."

Tom glanced up at Nott who had a neutral expression on his face. Quietly, Tom asked, "Why did you ignore me?"

Mary sighed, "Honestly? You scared me that night. The look on your face..." She paused for a moment then continued, "The expression was almost mad. It was scary."

"I think you are scary every morning, mate." Nott chimed in. "Especially before you get your shower." Nott made a show of shivering. Tom had to chuckle at Nott's sally.

The mood was broken with Tom's laugh. The girls seemed to relax a bit. The girls started to smile at each other.

Tom frowned, "I am trying to be mature about this, but you are supposed to be my friends. I'm not sure I'm ready to just forgive you.

You can't ask me to just forget the last month. It's not going to happen."

The girls' smiles went away.

Mary nodded, "I understand, Tom. We need to earn your forgiveness."

Tom shrugged. Dad always said forgiveness could not be earned, it had to be given. Forgiveness was not something that came easily to Tom. He knew that. The years in the orphanage left a mark. Tom also knew he had a temper and he recognized weeks ago that he had gone too far in his actions responding to Dolohov.

Slowly at first, the chatter around Tom started to pick up. Only a couple words at first, but by the end of the lunch hour it almost sounded like it had before. Almost. It was a bit forced and the girls kept glancing at Tom to see his reaction but it was a huge improvement over the last few weeks.

Realizing it was almost time for Herbology, Tom and the Slytherin Second years quickly finished and stood to leave. As he stood, Tom glanced over at the Gdansk table. He caught Ela smiling at him. Then she winked. Tom laughed and remembered you did not have to be in Slytherin to be cunning.

The first Saturday after the Dark Army attack was the first Quidditch weekend. The Quidditch schedule had been modified to allow for five Houses. The inclusion of Gdansk threw off the traditional schedule. It meant there would be two extra Quidditch weekends and two of the existing weekends would be doubleheaders.

The first weekend was the traditional Slytherin-Gryffindor grudge match. Both teams were particularly strong and they were fanatical. Only one new player had been added to the Gryffindor team this year. All of the Slytherin side was returning players. All of the players were in their final three years at Hogwarts. In fact, over half the players in today's match were Seventh years.

The Seventh year Gryffindors and Slytherins maintained a large rivalry throughout their Hogwarts time. It was not the nasty, brutal

episodes that would later occur. While not really friendly matches, it was more a question of skill and bragging rights. This would be the only time the two powerhouses would meet in direct competition. Winning this match meant almost as much to the players as winning the Quidditch Cup.

Tom, Not and the Slytherin girls were joined by Ela and Janek in the Slytherin stands. Tom invited the Gdansk students to join them in cheering on the Slytherin squad. Tom enjoyed their company in Potions class and wanted to get to know them better.

Nott nudged Tom and gestured towards Janek. It seemed Tom was not the only one interested in getting to know the Gdansk students better. Penelope could not take her eyes off Janek. She had this adoring, puppy dog expression that made Tom laugh.

The two Slytherin boys suppressed their laughter until Ela, who was deep into a hair care discussion with Laura and Mary, turned to them and simply said, "Be nice." Then she turned back to her conversation without missing a beat. The two boys started laughing. It earned Tom and Nott an elbow from Mary and Xurana, respectively.

"Good afternoon, students and guests! Welcome to the inaugural Quadditch match of the 1940-41 season, Gryffindor versus Slytherin!" The crowd roared their approval and enthusiasm. Even the Gdansk students, who had no rivalries yet, went wild. The announcer was a Ravenclaw named John Burke.

"For Gryffindor: Captain and Keeper Adam Long!" The keeper flew onto the pitch and quickly circled the field. "At Chaser: Michael Moon, Hilbert Dunning and Thomas Spinnet!" The chasers flew out in formation and joined up on their keeper. "The Gryffindor Beaters: Isaiah Wood and Graham McAdams!" Two large boys flew out to join the Gryffindor formation. "And in Seeker, Anna Winston!" The lone female on either side flew out to fly above the rest of the formation. She orbited around them in a show of aerial acrobatics. Then they landed near the Gryffindor stands.

"Now for Slytherin: Keeper Andrew McDuff!" The Fifth year prefect flew out of a corner of the stands.

Nott leaned over, "Now we know how his nose got broken!"

Burke continued, "At Chaser: Captain Deminca Lestratange, August FitzHugh, and Wysle Danihor!" The chasers flew out in a complex pattern. Unlike the Gryffindor formation flying, the Slytherin squad appeared to be dancing in air. "At Beaters: Malcolm Malicshka and Brace Flint!" Two large boys flew onto the pitch. They entered a flight pattern that ran counter to the chasers pattern. "And at Seeker: Delmar Malfoy!" The Slytherin seeker was unusually large for the position. He was very quick for his size and he used his size to force his competition off the Snitch.

The Slytherin team grounded and Mr. Ariettas, the Hogwarts Flying Instructor, stepped out to be referee. In a short time, the players were back in the air. Mr. Ariettas released the Snitch. Then he threw off the Quaffle. The match had begun!

FitzHugh caught the Quaffle and quickly passed it to Lestrache. That kicked off a blizzard of crisp passing between the Slytherin Chasers. The Gryffindor Chasers could not force a turnover but disrupted the Slytherin play enough to keep them from getting a direct shot on the rings. The Bludgers screamed amongst the chasers on both sides as the Beaters waged their own war while the Seekers circled above looking for the Golden Snitch.

"This looks almost like a professional match!" Nott yelled enthusiastically. Tom had to agree. The level of play on both sides was impressive.

After thirty minutes, the score was only 30-10 Slytherin. Suddenly, Malfoy rolled into a dive into the midst of the Chasers and Beaters swirling below him. The Gryffindor Seeker dove to intercept him, looking for the Snitch.

Malfoy kicked his broom into high gear towards the Gryffindor rings; Winston in pursuit behind him. Suddenly he pulled up and gained altitude. Their passage disrupted a Gryffindor play and distracted the Gryffindor Beaters. The Slytherin Chasers used the distraction to steal the Quaffle when a Bludger slammed into Moon. The Slytherin Chasers used the steal to bring the score to 40-10.

Twenty minutes later, the Seekers had climbed two hundred feet over the pitch as the score reached 110-50. The Snitch led them on an elusive chase through the sky. The Seekers approached from opposing directions, boxing the Snitch.

The Snitch dropped into a dive straight down towards the center of the pitch. The two Seekers dove in pursuit. Malfoy used his larger mass to take the most direct line in chasing the Snitch. Winston used her additional speed to compensate for taking a less direct line.

The pair plunged in a two hundred foot power dive. The Snitch strained to stay out of reach but the Seekers rapidly gained ground. Neither Seeker was aware of anything but their catching their prey.

At twenty feet in height, Anna Winston recognized the approaching danger and pulled up. She pulled out of the dive to have her feet dragging in the grass. The gravitational forces slammed into the slim girl like a swarm of Bludgers.

Malfoy noticed a split second later as Winston pulled up. However the split second of difference and his larger mass made all of the difference. Malfoy's Comet 180 was the newest and best broom on the market. It had an improved version of the Horton-Keitch Braking Charm. It was not enough.

Malfoy slammed into the ground at over 95 miles per hour. He had pulled up enough that he came in at an almost right angle to the ground. A dull 'Whomp!' was heard as he made impact. The Seeker seemed to bounce and dropped boneless to the ground. The stands were silent for a moment and then the screams rang out. The Snitch fluttered forgotten near the fallen Seeker.

A pall settled over the school after Malfoy's fall. Quick work by Madam O'Niel and a team of Healers from St. Mungos saved the young wizard's life. His pelvis and spine shattered on impact. His spinal column avoided serious damage but the force of the impact damaged his internal organs.

The Healers saved his life, but the impact ended his Quidditch career. The potions and healing charms would enable him to live a normal life but he would not be able to handle the strains playing Quidditch or

even aggressive flying would place on his body. Malfoy ranted and raved when told the news. He screamed about vengeance on Winston for causing him to crash.

The match was postponed due to the severity of the crash. They would fly the following weekend to finish the match. This left the Slytherin team in a quandary. They needed to fill the Seeker position in short order.

Tryouts were held the next Monday after classes ended. Ten Slytherin boys of various years stood on the pitch with their brooms in hand. Any female Slytherins interested in playing knew Lestrangle, so why bother to tryout if he would never select them? Tom was the only Second year to dare to try out. Nott stood in the stands watching with the vast majority of the Slytherin House. (He wanted to play Chaser on next year's team.)

Tom calmly held his broom and ignored the comments from the older boys around him. After six years of Quidditch games with his dad, Tom felt confident in his skills as a Seeker. While he did not have James's natural affinity for flying, his father had taught Tom a number of the skills, tricks and strategies of a good Seeker.

The tryouts consisted of Lestrangle releasing a Snitch and allowing a pair of candidates to race after it. It was a single elimination tournament. The one to win all of his pairings would be the new Slytherin Seeker.

Tom's first round was against a Fourth year he did not know. The boy seemed a bit tentative on his broom, especially on a dive. Tom felt a thrill of excitement during his dive to catch the Snitch.

Winning his first round easily, Tom settled down to watch the rest of the first round. Four more pairs flew after Tom. While he evaluated his competition, Tom felt an odd sense of enjoyment and anticipation. It did not seem to be coming from his emotions but Tom felt them anyway. He shook his head to clear the sensation and resumed watching.

The second round found five players remaining. Lestrangle gave one of his Seventh year roommates a bye on the second round. Tom

thought that was stupid if the objective was to win. He should have given the bye to the one he saw as the best flyer.

In the second round, Tom faced his pick for the best all-around flyer. The Fifth year had incredible flying skills. He was small for his age and very quick. Their round went on for twenty minutes. Neither flyer could dominate. In the end it came down to who wanted it more.

The Snitch was flying six inches off the pitch. Tom was in the weeds chasing the Snitch while the Fifth year flew slightly higher in a gamble to Snitch would have to pull up. The gamble did not pay off. Tom's 'lawn mowing' skills allowed him to reach out to his full extension to grasp the Snitch with his fingertips. He overbalanced on the grab and hit the ground. He rolled to a stop after ten feet. The first thing he did not rolling onto his back was to reach up showing he still held the Snitch.

Laying on the pitch, Tom felt a wave of excitement and happiness wash over him.

Tom was a bit sore going into the third round. The Seventh year had a bye again, leaving Tom facing a Sixth year. This opponent was a larger boy in the model of Malfoy. The Sixth year flew very aggressively. He did not have a great technique but he was better than average. His aggression made up for any lack of technique.

Tom enjoyed this round more than his previous rounds. Both boys wore matching grins as they chased after the Snitch. They flew for almost thirty minutes all over the pitch and between the stands.

In the end, it came to a loop to end it. The Snitch went vertical for thirty feet, pulled over and dove for the ground. The Sixth year tried to skid into a turn to chase after it. Tom allowed himself to swing underneath the broom holding on with one arm and leg. (Dad told him this was called a Sloth-Grip Roll.) Tom caught the Snitch as he swung back up and onto his broom.

Tom landed to a loud cheering from the watching Slytherins. The feelings of excitement were growing.

The Sixth year landed next to him with a huge grin. "That was the best chase I've had in a long time! We have to do that again!"

Tom nodded his agreement. He reached his hand out. "I'm Tom Evans."

The Sixth year grinned and took Tom's hand, "Everyone knows who you are. I'm Xavier Fudge. Good luck with the final round!"

Tom thanked him and walked over to where Lestrangle waited with his roommate. The roommate was Oscar Zambini. Zambini looked bored, as this was only a formality as Tom approached.

'It may be,' thought Tom. 'I wouldn't put it past Lestrangle to just pick his mate even if I win.'

"Look a little worn, Evans. Sure you're up to this?" Lestrangle taunted.

Tom nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

Lestrangle pulled a Snitch out of his pocket and quickly released it. The golden blur shot into the afternoon sky. Obviously forewarned, Zambini immediately jumped on his broom and took off in pursuit.

"Get going, Evans!" Lestrangle growled.

Tom jumped onto his broom and rocketed after Zambini and the Snitch. Surprisingly, most of the Slytherin watchers cheered Tom as he flew past the stand. Tom felt encouragement and confidence as he locked onto the elusive golden orb.

Zambini was not nearly as good a flyer as Fudge. In fact, Tom was not sure how he made it out of the first round. 'Lestrangle must have cheated' Then he concentrated on catching the Snitch.

The Snitch led them on a merry chase weaving in and out of the stands at breakneck speeds. Tom overtook Zambini, sliding past before the larger boy could block him. The Snitch veered onto the pitch and hurtled straight towards the scoring rings. Tom flattened himself on the broom as he shot through the center ring directly behind the Snitch. The larger Zambini rose over the ring to pass it.

Flying through the ring bought Tom the time he needed. Before the Snitch could twist away, Tom snatched it out of the air.

He spun his broom and hovered in place to raise the Snitch above his head with a huge grin on his face. The Slytherins in the stands applauded Tom's win. For the first time all year, Tom felt like a member of his House.

Tom landed to receive the congratulations of the Slytherins. Tom's friends came out of the stands. Lestrangle was forced to give Tom the position, although he looked like he would rather eat glass.

As the procession of Slytherins left the pitch to walk back to the castle, Tom noticed someone standing alone with a large dog in the Gryffindor stands. Tom hopped onto his broom and flew over to the stands.

"Dad! Do you see? I got Seeker!"

James embraced his son. "That was wonderful flying. Congratulations! I loved the Sloth-Grip Roll you performed."

Tom grinned, "Thanks, Dad! How did you know we were having tryouts?"

"Oh, Professor Dumbledore may have absently mentioned it last night at the Three Broomsticks."

Tom snorted in disbelief. He didn't think his Transfiguration professor ever did anything 'by accident'.

Then Tom remembered something. "Dad, remember the stories you told me about Voldemort? About your connection I mean?" James nodded. "You were here the whole time? I think I could feel your emotions. Either that I'm an empath and it was somebody else."

James frowned slightly and sat down. He gestured to Tom to sit also. "We don't have a lot of time right now. Your friends are waiting."

Tom glanced over and saw his father was right.

"It has happened for me before, when the twins were born. I felt your happiness even in Germany. I never knew if Voldemort got the same feedback I did."

"Does that mean if I get angry you will get the pain you used to?" Tom asked.

James shrugged. "I don't know. Our relationship is a bit different then it was between Voldemort and me. I have never felt pain in my scar since I arrived here." James place his hand on Tom's shoulder. "Don't worry about it now. We can look into it during your Christmas holiday. Go enjoy your time with your friends."

Tom smiled, feeling slightly relieved, "Thanks Dad, I feel better." Mounting his broom, Tom said, "I will come home next weekend during the Hogsmeade trip."

James laughed, "Your mum and I will start cooking for the horde about to descend on us."

"Please let Mum and Cillie do the cooking!"

James acted hurt. "Oi, brat! Get out of here!"

Laughing, Tom flew off to join his friends.

November 7, 1939

"I don't think I am ever going to learn anything from Merrythought."

Mary groaned without looking up from her homework. "We know Tom. You think she is too easy. Not all of us are getting O's in all of our classes!"

Laura, Mary, Tom, Nott and Janek had met in an unused classroom to work on their DADA homework. With the addition of two hundred additional students, finding space in the library was becoming difficult.

"I just wish she would retire and get it over with. That is all she talks about! I bet she spent ten bloody minutes talking about her retirement plans today!" Tom ran his hands through his hair in frustration.

“Language, Tom!” Mary scolded him.

Tom made a face at the top of her head to the amusement of Nott and Janek.

Nott laughed, “Tom, are you worried about your first Quidditch game? I heard the Seventh years are threatening mayhem if you miss the Snitch.”

“At first, they were obnoxious at every practice. Lestrangle keeps threatening to put Zambini in even though I beat him. I was tempted to let him,” Tom answered with a frown. “Then the last couple of days they have been acting really odd. Now they are all friendly little suck-ups.”

Laura looked up at Tom with a nervous expression. In a quiet voice she said, “I might know why.” Tom gave her a curious glance. “Don’t get angry. I just heard it at lunch today.”

Tom felt a chill. “When people say that it usually means I am going to have a reason to get angry. Talk, Parkinson.” The last was said with a wary grin on his face so it did not sound nasty.

Now Laura looked really nervous. “Um.. some of the older students in the house are saying you are the Heir of Slytherin. Since you’re a Parcelmouth, it does make sense. Especially after your demonstration the first night of school.”

“Oh, bugger me!” Tom whispered in disbelief. How do you counter act a rumor, no matter how outlandish, when it is true?

Now Mary looked up from her scroll. “I had a Sixth year girl ask me today in the loo if you had taken us to the Chamber of Secrets.” Laura and Janek looked confused at the reference.

“The Chamber of Secrets?” Janek asked.

“It is in “Hogwarts: A History,” Mary answered. “According to legend, the Founder of our House was chased out of Hogwarts by the other Founders. He supposedly left a hidden chamber behind to help his Heir to take his revenge and kill of all the muggle-born students.

Slytherin was a Parselmouth. Since Tom is one also, they believe he must be Slytherin's Heir."

Janek looked less confused now but no more comfortable. "After a thousand years without an Heir, why would they think he has come now?"

"Tom is the only Parselmouth to attend Hogwarts in over 500 years," Laura answered.

Mary chimed in, "From their point of view, if it's not Tom then the Heir isn't coming. The traditional English Purebloods hate Muggles and muggle-born."

Tom noticed Nott watching him all through the exchange. He slowly smiled at Tom, then turned to the group, "The stupid thing is Tommy-boy here had made it abundantly clear where he falls on the whole blood issue."

Mary shrugged, "They have an answer for that too. Tom is publicly stating his position whilst secretly plotting his campaign. It would be a very Slytherin thing to do. I heard an idiot claim you had already accepted him as a follower."

Tom looked at her with a shocked expression. Then he started knocking his head on the table. No wonder Voldemort was able to rise to power. The fools threw themselves at him! He probably stood in the middle of the common room, proclaimed himself the Heir of Slytherin and collected his followers!

"Please tell me this has not spread outside of our House," Tom said in a strangled voice.

Mary patted his hand. "As far as I know, Janek is the only non-Slytherin to hear."

Janek instantly said, "I'm not going to say anything."

"I know you won't, Janek," Tom assured his friend. "What should I do about this?"

"Xurana said she was trying to find out who started the rumor. Her family is friendly with the Lestranges and Malfoys," Laura commented. "Until then, just ignore it."

Tom sighed. "Okay, I can't study now. Hey Nott, want to go flying?"

"I don't know, Tom. I have this work to do... okay, you talked me into it. Let's grab our brooms." Snatching up his things, Nott said, "Ladies, Janek, we'll see you at dinner." In a flash the two boys were out of the room.

Ten minutes later the boys approached the pitch. Nott grabbed Tom's arm. "Do you want to go flying or do you want to talk first?"

Tom stopped and looked down. "What do you know?" he asked.

"After the attack, my father sent me some letters asking about you, pointed letters. He asked about you being a Parcelmouth and if you knew who your birthparents were." He paused for a moment. "I actually wonder if the rumors started *inside* our House or if it was some of our Slytherin parents."

"This gets better and better," Tom groaned.

"I will squash the rumors, Tom, if you can tell me flat out that you are not Slytherin's Heir."

"Let's go sit in the stands," Tom suggested more to buy a little time than any desire to actually sit.

As he followed Tom, Nott commented, "Delaying answering makes it look like you are getting ready to lie to me."

Tom dropped down on a bench. He looked straight at Nott. "I am the only remaining blood heir of Salazar Slytherin. Through my mother I am descended from the Gaunt family. I actually have a ring and locket that was his."

Nott looked stunned. He never expected Tom to openly admit his heritage. A proper Slytherin would have waited until an advantageous

moment to let out that fact. Nott realized he was sitting with his mouth open. He closed his mouth with an audible pop.

“Surprised I admitted it?” Tom asked.

Nott could only nod in his surprise.

“I knew it would come out eventually.” Looking away he mumbled, “Just not this soon.”

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?”

“Dad and I decided we didn’t want people making a big deal out of it. Within our House, I’ll be an instant celebrity. Outside the House, I will become an instant Dark Wizard. Everything I do will be looked at to see what my true objective is. I don’t want to be pointed at because of my birth.”

Nott shook his head. “I don’t understand. This is a great way to get respect and power. Most of the Wizengamot would give their first born son for that kind of background. I bloody know my father and grandfather would.”

Tom frowned at his best mate. “Nott, we’re twelve years old. I don’t want to worry about power! I want to play Quidditch, complain about teachers and look at girls. I don’t want politicians and would-be Dark Wizards either trying to recruit me or follow me!”

Nott sat silently for a bit. Then he nodded, “Okay, I can see your point. I will help you divert some the rumors. You’ll owe me though.”

Tom felt a trickle of anger. “Owe you?”

“Yep, I want a plate of your mum’s chocolate biscuits. This is going to be a lot of work.”

Tom started to laugh. “You had me worried.”

“I won’t tell my father or anyone else, but I think the girls will have their own opinion no matter what I say.”

“When hasn’t that been true?” Tom snorted. “Let’s go fly.”

As they resumed their walk, Nott asked, “So Tom, what girls have you been looking at?”

“What! I was making a point!”

Nott snickered. “Let’s see. Mary? Laura? Xurana? I know Ela! How about that Gryffindor Third year? What’s her name? Oh yah, Minerva!”

“Minerva! Why you little...”

The two boys ran onto the pitch. Nott jumped on his broom with Tom in pursuit.

April 5, 1940

The school year passed in a blur for Tom and his friends. Tom’s circle of friends grew to firmly include Janek and Ela. None of the classes proved to be particularly difficult or challenging for Tom. Professor Flitwick tried to make things challenging with additional extra work for Tom but that only helped a little.

The Heir of Slytherin rumors subsided after a bit. They never went away but Tom’s refusal to announce himself added enough doubt to keep the whisperings to a minimum. Tom was surprised when Xurana turned out to be his strongest supporter in quashing the rumors. He figured she was so supportive to make up for the disastrous start of the year.

Tom never told either of his parents about the rumors. He knew Dad would understand but he wanted to handle this on his own. Tom felt his dad had too much to do already. The Ministry was pulling him more and more into the war. Tom teased him about his Gryffindor plunge into mortal danger, but Tom understood. So with the help of Nott and his other friends, Tom generally kept his head down and avoided confirming any rumors.

The Quidditch season played out well too. Tom managed to catch the Snitch twenty minutes into resumed play against Gryffindor. They lost

to Ravenclaw but they did beat Hufflepuff and Gdansk. Tom caught the Snitch against Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff but missed it against Gdansk. They finished tied for second with Ravenclaw for the Quidditch cup. Gryffindor won on points. Slytherin, Gryffindor and Ravenclaw each lost one match against one of the others.

The only surprise in the second half of the school year was the addition to a fully certified Healer to the Hogwart's staff. The Healer would be shared between Hogwarts and the new school in Wales. Between the two locations there were now over 800 magical students in Great Britain. The Poles represented the largest addition, but students from all over Eastern Europe and the Low Countries trickled in all year. The Board of Governors decided with the Phoenix Foundation that it was too much to handle with just a pair of medi-witches.

Tom was surprised by who filled the new position. He walked into the Hospital Wing supporting an injured Robert Wiley. The muggle-born Slytherin First year crashed into a castle wall while trying to get over his fear of flying. Tom found him limping into the school dragging a snapped broom. Tom helped the boy to the Hospital Wing to find one of the last people he expected, his mum.

Sarah Evans was sitting chatting with Madam O'Niel. "Mum, what are you doing here?"

"That would be Healer Evans to you, Mr. Evans," Madam O'Niel said in a stern voice. "The Healer is the new coordinator for the schools' Hospital Wings."

Sarah gave Tom a little wink. "You can run but you can't hide."

The two witches walked over to look at the injured Wiley. Madam O'Niel levitated him onto a bed.

"And what happened to you, Mr. Wiley..."

While Madam O'Niel worked with Robert, Sarah stayed with her eldest son. At seven months pregnant, she was starting to show.

"I brought some biscuits for you. You seem to be eating them quickly."

Tom smiled. "Bribes. It is amazing what you can get a teenager to do for a couple biscuits."

Sarah laughed, "How Slytherin of you." She glanced around. Then she leaned in, "I heard about a certain rumor leaking out."

Tom looked panicked. "How did you hear?"

"Your father," came a bland answer.

Tom wanted to groan. "How did he find out?"

Sarah chuckled. "Mr. Constant Vigilance? I have no clue. He didn't want me to tell you he knew."

That surprised Tom. "Why not?"

"He thought you were handling the situation better alone than with his involvement. I think because of his, um, history he didn't want to be seen as manipulating the situation. He said if you needed his help you would come to him. He trusted you to know when that was." Sarah smiled. "I, however, am a mother and I wanted to make sure you are okay and know you can come talk to me even if you don't want us to help."

Tom felt a bit conflicted. He appreciated his mother's comments but he also resented his father's spying on him. Yet Dad also approved of how Tom was handling the situation. He wasn't really sure how he felt right now.

Now Sarah had a mischievous expression on her face. "I understand there was some confusion yesterday in the Gryffindor tower."

Tom gave her an innocent look in response. "I heard the Gryffindors all had the hair turn yellow and black. I suspect some 'puffs were playing a prank. You know how those 'puffs are."

The former Hufflepuff witch gave him a small grin. “Especially the ones who have Slytherin sons who don’t completely clean up their work in their mum’s potions lab.”

Tom laughed at her comment. “oops”

“How did you get the potion into the tower before breakfast?”

“I recruited a new assistant.” Tom smirked. “He used an eye dropper while they were sleeping.”

Sarah started to giggle. “Your father thought you snatched his Map to get the password. Who is your new cohort?”

Tom smirked, “That would be telling. I don’t want to cause my friend any trouble. I promise I won’t prank the staff table, at least until next year.”

Sarah laughed again, “Get out of here you scamp. Don’t get caught.”

Tom gave his mum a kiss goodbye and almost skipped out of the Hospital Wing. Being told not to get caught also gave permission to carry on!

The year was coming to a close. After a chaotic start things settled into a fairly normal year. The student body had grown by over 60 but that just made things more interesting.

A strange rash on minor pranks broke up the last month. All five Houses received their share of pranks. After the Gryffindors, the Hufflepuffs turned green and silver. The Slytherins talked backwards for an entire day. The Gdansk students spent twenty-four hours singing everything they tried to say. Finally the Ravenclaws kept losing their books.

The Seventh years slept through the first two hours of their DADA NEWT exams. No one could wake them up. They were moved back one day to allow the students to recover from their panic when they woke up and discovered the time. (Several students still needed Calming Droughts.) Madam Marchbanks commented that maybe points should be taken away for falling for the prank.

The pranksters did not take credit for their acts. Most students thought it was coming from all five of the Houses. Professor Dippet, assisted by Professor Merrythought, questioned a number of students. Professor Dumbledore was not much help in their quest. He just sat, eyes twinkling, saying, "On my."

The rumors of Tom being the Heir of Slytherin returned with a vengeance during the last week of school. The soon to be departing Seventh years started pushing Tom to make a public (at least public within the House) declaration of his blood.

Tom and his friends were sitting in their accustomed place in the Common Room. None of the Slytherins blinked anymore at the presence of Ela and Janek. Lestrangle and his mates walked up to where Mary was slaughtering Tom at Wizard Chess.

"Evans, I want to know. Are you the Heir of Slytherin?" Lestrangle demanded.

Tom sighed, he was tired of this. "Deminca, why won't you let that go?" Tom knew Lestrangle hated his first name.

Lestrangle growled, "We have the right to know."

Tom stood up to face the older boy. "Why would you have a right to know? What good do you think it will do?"

"You have to fulfill your forefather's final wish!" This piece of wisdom came from Wysle Danihor, a member of the Seventh year class.

Xurana stood up. "If Tom was Slytherin's Heir, he would tell us. Leave him alone!"

Tom appreciated her defense but it was an awkward kind of help. He answered Wysle's comment. "You mean a thousand year old legend? How do you know, I mean really know, what Slytherin would have wanted? The Muggles have an old saying, 'Be careful what you wish for.'"

Robert Wiley snickered at hearing that. No one else in the House had ever heard it before.

“What does that mean?” Lestrangle demanded.

“It means that what you get and what you wanted may be two entirely different things.” You could here the sentence end with an unspoken “you idiot” at the end. “I have made my permission on bullies and the whole blood issue abundantly clear. IF I could release Slytherin’s monster, do you really think I would unleash it on muggle-born?”

“Blood Traitor, you defile Slytherin’s memory.”

Tom started to feel his blood boil. Red specks started to appear in his vision. “How could I be a Blood Traitor? By your reckoning, I am a mere Half Blood! My father was a Muggle, not even a muggle-born! So tell me, Pure Blood, would Slytherin’s blood be enough to make me pure in your eyes? Can you wrap your tiny little mind around the fact that meant a descendant of Slytherin married a Muggle?”

Tom stood five feet tall and 7.5 stone(105 lbs.). Lestrangle was 5’8 and over 13 stone(185 lbs.). However, Lestrangle was the one to step back. The look on Tom’s face and the waves of magic pouring off him drove a spike of fear into the older wizard.

Tom felt a hand on each of his shoulders.

“Tom, relax. Take a deep breath,” Mary.

“Let it go, Tom. It is not worth it,” Nott. Tom could hear his silent message. ‘Not now.’

Tom tried to pull himself back. He closed his eyes. “I am going to pack my trunk. I suggest you leave me alone.” Then he opened his eyes and pushed past the assembled crowd. They parted to left him pass.

As he climbed the stairs, he heard a boy’s voice whisper incredulously, “Did his eyes just turn red?”

Tom really needed to get home. He had to talk to his dad and Salazar.

Chapter 18 – Paris

June 1, 1940

James sat in the small cafe in Muggle Paris. He sat at the small table tucked into the corner while reading a local newspaper, oblivious to his surroundings. Using various glamours and Muggle disguises, James appeared as an eager eighteen year-old with sandy blond hair and grey eyes. Muggle make-up covered up the lightning scar.

Around him, Paris was in chaos. The citizens of Paris moved in agitated, chaotic patterns. Twenty days ago, the Nazi army launched a “Lightning War” or Blitzkrieg against France and the Low Countries. The combined technological terrors of armor and aircraft enabled the Germans to move incredibly fast, crushing all in their path. The people of Paris panicked with the thought of the approaching invaders. In the last month, almost a third of the city’s residents had fled for the Atlantic or Mediterranean coasts. The wealthier refugees were leaving for England or the French colonies.

The common French citizen placed their faith in the government to protect them. The French military built the Maginot Line after the First World War. The series of interlocking bunkers and fortresses presented a formidable obstacle. Many considered it a wonder of modern engineering. Underground rails and tunnels enabled the rapid movement of troops and supplies throughout the line. The forts’ field of fire overlapped, enabling the forts to protect each other.

The German Army solved this by invading the Low Countries. Holland surrendered after five days of fighting. Belgium held out for eighteen. The British Army, sent to help repel the invaders, retreated to the city of Dunkirk. Unable to pull all of their troops out, the British citizens responded by arriving in pleasure boats, barges and even rowboats to extract the troops safely back to Britain. As James sat in the Parisian café, the evacuation continued.

With Holland and Belgium surrendered, and the British Army in full retreat, the German army moved south into France. The Maginot Line did not extend to cover the French northern boarder with Belgium. The highly trained, motivated, and equipped veteran German army and Luftwaffe faced a valiant but relatively under equipped and

trained French opponent. Expecting the Maginot Line to hold back the Germans, the French army was ill prepared to face the German onslaught.

James estimated another ten to fifteen days before the Germans reached Paris. The city was still in denial. Many citizens were angry or acted as if nothing was wrong.

This denial extended to the magical community also. James arrived in Paris on April 20th. Under the cover name of Wesley Roberts, James joined the working group sent by the British MoM to coordinate efforts against the Dark Army. James worked as the junior flunky of the mission, performing gopher duty more often than anything. His true task was to ensure the protection of the mission and provide a counterintelligence oversight.

The French MoM pleasantly surprised James. The witches and wizards of the Ministry seemed highly competent and prepared to face the Dark Army. After evaluating the invasion of Poland, the French MoM enacted a series of measures to prevent a repeat of the tactics. More importantly, they hid those preparations so the Dark Army did not seem to have a reason to create new ones.

Muggle-repealing charms prevented the advancing German army from entering the various magical locations along their advance. Special wards, triggered when anti-Appartition or anti-Portkey wards were cast, blocking the travel prevention wards giving the local wizards and witches time to escape. The wards had to be prepared before the travel blocking wards in order to be effective. (James wondered to himself why similar wards were never cast during the war with Voldemort.)

James sipped his tea. He was aware he was being observed for some time. His wand sat in his hand, hidden by the curl of the newspaper. The watchers followed James from his Muggle hotel and to the café. James had not spotted his watchers yet, but he knew they were there.

Then James spotted a man in completely normal Muggle clothes. Not one piece of clothing seemed out of place on the Paris street; nothing to give away his being a wizard. However, the man walked with a

complete calmness and surety unseen in the Muggles surrounding James. Even those with a brave front seemed nervous of the coming battle.

The young waitress came by to ask James if he needed a refill. James answered her in French, "Yes and please bring me an extra cup, please. I will have company soon."

The waitress nodded and moved away from the table. James resumed his reading of the paper. A couple of moments later, a figure dropped into the chair across from James.

"Good morning, Mr. Roberts. I am sorry to have surprised you like this but I need to speak with you." The voice spoke in a cultured Parisian accent.

James lowered his paper slightly to examine his new 'guest'. The man appeared middle-aged with brown hair and brown eyes, average build and average height. All in all, a completely forgettable individual, perfect for a spy.

The nondescript man smiled in a condescending way. "You really should be more careful, Mr. Roberts. Paris can be a dangerous place these days."

James continued to silently observe his guest for ten more seconds. Then the waitress returned with James's refill and a new cup for James's guest.

"I see your guest has arrived, sir. May I get you anything else?"

James declined and thanked her. Then he returned to his observation of his guest.

James could see an element of shock in the man's eyes. Keeping his face neutral, James closed his paper into his right hand, still hiding his wand while appearing to be unarmed. James picked up his teacup with his left hand and took a sip.

"You knew we were watching you," the man stated.

James lowered his teacup and said, "You seem to have the advantage of me."

"My name is Claude Delacour. I am an Auror with the French Ministry."

James started at the name. Could this be a relative of Fleur? "Have I broken any of your laws?"

"Mr. Roberts, we know you are acting as security for Ambassador Longbottom's delegation. You are very subtle but this is our country. We would have appreciated the courtesy of notification."

James sipped his tea and did not reply.

The French Auror nodded at the lack of response. "What do you think about the plans to evacuate Beauxbatons?"

"Plans, I don't know what you mean?"

"You can relax, Mr. Roberts. We have secured this café. No one can hear what we say. A Listening Charm will hear only a discussion of football and the weather," the Auror assured James with a smile.

James performed a wandless charm to confirm their status. With his mouth still hidden by the teacup, James murmured, "How did you catch on to me?"

The Auror gave a shrug. "You played your role perfectly. The rest of your party gave subtle clues that your status was not just that of a junior aide."

James sighed. He really did not like this secret agent stuff. He was not James Bond. His training was closer to that of a Muggle commando than anything else. No one would have dreamt of sending Harry Potter undercover. Combat and small-unit tactics were James's forte. James found himself wishing for a nice simple duel to the death.

"So, why are you breaking my cover?"

Now it was the Auror's turn to sigh. "We have a problem. The Dark Lord seems to be targeting Beauxbatons. We believe he is attempting to prevent the evacuation. Professor Dumbledore suggested we contact you."

Resisting the urge to growl about Albus, James asked, "What are they doing?"

"We captured an injured owl last week. The message seemed inane but the sender was a known Grindelwald supporter in the village outside the school. When we tried to find the intended recipient, our owls attempted to fly into Germany. The note said the party plans were almost complete and the invitations would be going out as planned."

"Are they going after the students or is there something at the school they want?" James asked.

"The crème of France's magical future attend Beauxbatons. Many of their parents hold seats in our Assembly, work in the Ministry or are wealthy. Capturing them would pressure their parents to remain behind."

James considered this for a moment. "Have they considered where they are evacuating to?"

"Eh, it is mixed. Some to our enclave in French Algeria, others to England. Your success at taking in the Polish students made an impact on many parents' thinking. Otherwise all would have gone to then enclave."

In the back of his mind, James realized that his influence was having much broader reaching impacts than he ever intended. Not only was he affecting English wizards, it was spreading to Europe as well. James set that aside as he considered the situation.

Finally, he sighed in defeat. "I just wanted to go home."

The French Auror grinned back. "I too wanted to stay with my last assignment. I was the coordinator to the veela community. It was an ... interesting position."

‘That explains a lot,’ thought James. Aloud he stated, “I admire your willpower.”

The grin was replaced by a sad look. “So did I. Then, alas, I was betrayed by a treacherous body part. One veela discovered I have a weakness for Italian food. Now she expects our first child.”

James laughed at Claude’s comments. James found himself taking a liking to Fleur’s probable grandfather. He had a nice relaxed air about him. Claude reminded James of Bill Weasley a lot. James wondered if Fleur had noticed the same similarity.

Claude stood and dropped several Francs on the table. “I think we must finish this conversation in my office, Mr. Roberts.” James agreed with a nod and the two wizards left the café.

The Palais Royal formerly housed one of the most famous Muggle-born Slytherin in the history of Hogwarts. Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu, Cardinal-Duc de Richelieu, attended Hogwarts prior to the opening of Beauxbatons. The French magic school started under his patronage. Born of Muggle nobles, the future Cardinal attended Hogwarts while most French witches and wizards still learned under the apprenticeship method. After his rise to power, Richelieu used his influence to provide a former royal palace for the new school. A staunch French patriot, Richelieu wanted French magic education to be the best in the world.

As powerful in the magical world as in the Muggle, the Cardinal established the French MoM in a wing of his palace. After his death, Muggle-repealing charms and other spells hid the magical government from the other occupants. James freely admitted the surroundings were much more luxurious and comfortable than the British MoM offices. The French MoM used a nondescript office as the DMLE entry into the ministry. Once past security, a magical wall similar to the Diagon Alley entry opened into the DMLE offices..

James and Claude entered the French Ministry DMLE offices without any sort of notice by the Aurors around them. In short order, they were seated in Claude’s office.

Once seated, Claude asked, “May I call you Wesley?”

James nodded, "It will do for now."

Claude's eyebrows rose. "It is not your real name? I thought you were an Auror. Only Unspeakables..." Claude stopped as he realized what he was saying. "Mon Dieu! That explains much. I wondered why I was directed to such a young Auror." Claude paused in thought. Then he said, "I will keep this to myself. May I ask your code name?"

"I am the Count."

James would have laughed at Claude's expression if he had not seen it before. After the events at Hogwarts in September, the Daily Prophet leaked the Count's role in fighting off the Dark Army wizards. Although denied by the Ministry, the Count had become whispered rumor to the public. The rumors fed on themselves becoming more fantastic with each retelling. Events and accidents completely unrelated to James were being attributed to the Count. Sarah enjoyed relating the various rumors of James's escapades that she heard at St. Mungos. James shrugged most of it off, although it was embarrassing. As Harry, he was used to notoriety as the Boy-Who-Lived. At least as James, when he took off the Unspeakable cloak, he could go back to being simple James Evans again.

Claude regained control of his reaction. "I understand why Professor Dumbledore pointed me to you. You have had experience with this kind of thing before."

"Too much. When do you plan on having the students evacuated?"

The Auror shrugged, "In the next three days. The term ends today. We are giving the parents a chance to decide."

"Are you sending the students home or keeping them at the school?"

"At the school." The Auror frowned. "German strafing attacks occur everywhere. We use coaches to transport the students to and from school. The charms allow the Muggles to see the carriages, but they ignore them and forget. However, the Luftwaffe is shooting up everything that moves. We cannot guarantee their safety."

James nodded in understanding. "If they want the students they will attack soon. You should also be moving all of your rare books and artifacts out of the country."

"Are you so sure that France will fall?" the Auror asked in a desperate voice.

"Too much depends on the Muggles. The French army will lose Paris soon. When Paris falls, the rest of the country will fold. The British Army just got their arses handed to them. The Americans are building up and will be sucked into the war eventually. Grindelwald and Hitler are working together. We will never be able to drive one out until the other at a time. Our side must work together also."

Claude nodded slowly, "I agree. I was hoping you would say I was wrong."

The two wizards launched into a discussion of protecting the students at Beauxbatons during the evacuation. Claude would be commanding the Auror team with James as the British observer. No French Unspeakables were available as they were all fighting the Dark Army's advance through France.

As the meeting ended, James asked, "Are the veela leaving the country also?"

"No," Claude answered, "they plan to isolate themselves in their Alpine communities. They are officially neutral and are trusting Grindelwald to honor that."

James could easily read the concern on the man's face.

(Flashback to October 5, 1939)

James entered the infirmary attached to the Unspeakables headquarters. Usually the infirmary housed Unspeakables injured on missions. Today is also housed a captive.

James approached a hospital bed with a bandaged patient. No guards stood over the captive. None were needed.

“Good morning, Count.”

“Guten morgen, Herr Spellfuhrer.”

The captive German wizard smiled. “It is nice to see a familiar face. So to speak.”

James grinned inside his hood. “I understand. Have they made determination on your back?”

The spellfuhrer frowned, “The spine severed my spinal column. Potions can regrow the bone, but not the nerves. From the waist down I am completely paralyzed.”

“I am sorry to hear that,” James said.

The captive waved it away. “I failed in my mission. I deserve this. My Lord would have punished me worse.”

James conjured a chair, “What may I call you?”

“My name is Franz. Franz vanEpps. It is nice to meet you, Count.” Franz smiled, “Are you here to start the interrogation?”

“Not exactly. I wanted to know why you attacked the Headmaster’s office.”

Franz frowned. “I don’t know. That was Christina’s mission.”

“What do you think she was looking for?”

“My Lord wants to collect ancient magics. He was a student at Hogwarts. He knows the Headmaster keeps a library. He also wants to know about the Founder, Slytherin.”

James kept any reaction from his voice. “Why did you join him?”

“We were told it was our duty in school to support our Lord’s quest for knowledge. Knowledge will set us free.”

‘Knowledge to send Earth to Hell. Literally,’ James thought.

“Tell me about Christina.”

“Crazy witch. Best dueler in my Lord’s service. Loves to use rare spells you’ve never heard of before. She’s obsessed with you. After you killed her mentor, she looked all over for information on you. No one heard of you before Dachau. Where did you come from? I’m not sure if she wants to fight you or marry you. Maybe both.

“What is her real, full name?”

The German wizard shrugged. “Don’t know. She is the Dark Lord’s favorite witch. She has always been with him.”

“Who was in charge that night, you or her?”

The wizard looked confused for a moment. “I’m not sure...” Then an odd look came to his face. “What did you give me?”

James handed the wizard some candy and said, “Here, have some chocolate.”

Franz smiled at the offer and popped the candy into his mouth. James waited in silence for the antidote to wear off. Vertaserum was not perfected until the late 1960’s. A couple weaker Truth Serums existed at this time but they could be resisted by a strong willed subjects and only yes or no questions could be asked.. James didn’t share the formula but had brewed a couple samples for his own use. The medi-witch unknowingly delivered three drops of the potion a couple of minutes before James walked into the room.

In seconds, the candy took effect knocking the wizard out. James then removed his memory of the conversation. Once he was done, James used an Ennervate to wake him.

“Good morning, Franz”

The conversation started over again, this time without any potion aid. Franze did not answer any questions of any substance. James wanted to ensure he had a real memory of resisting any questions.

Only at the end of the conversation did anything new come up. James asked Franz what the effects of his mission's failure would be.

Franz paled and turned his head from James. After a moment, James heard him murmur, "I did my best, my love."

Franz did not turn back. After ten minutes, James left the room.

James recognized the look on Franz and Claude's faces. He had seen it all too often in his last war and was seeing it again in this one. The look of a man with loved ones in harms way and him powerless to help them.

James joined Claude's team as they Apparated to Beauxbatons. James soon discovered the school stood near the edge of the Mediterranean. A huge, manicured lawn stretched around the school with gardens and fountains scattered around the grounds. The building itself was smaller than Hogwarts but probably larger in usable area. The warm Mediterranean sun bathed everything in a late afternoon glow. Overall, it struck James as one of the most beautiful locations he had ever seen.

'No wonder Fleur was so obnoxious at the Tournament,' James thought. 'This place is gorgeous. I could have handled school in a warmer, sunnier locale.'

The Auror team spread out in pairs to patrol the school. James followed Claude to the Headmaster's office. The halls of Beauxbatons were brilliantly shined and ornate. No armor suits lined the halls, but flower arrangements were everywhere.

'Okay, maybe the halls would've driven me spare.'

The Beauxbatons Headmaster, Professor Clarke Laramée, welcomed the two wizards to his office. James was introduced as a British Auror sent to assist in the evacuation. The professor eyed James with distaste and proceeded to ignore his presence.

Sitting in the office, James could not help comparing the Headmaster to the Beauxbatons Headmaster he knew from the Triwizard Tournament. Professor Laramée was of medium height but very thin.

He had a permanent squint to his small, dark eyes and only a fringe of grey hair crowning his head. The professor was widely regarded as one of the best magical scholars and potion masters in Europe. However, the professor also maintained a fussy and gloomy manner. He reminded James of Eeyore from the Winnie the Pooh books he read to Katie and Michael.

The professor seated himself behind his desk, straightening a couple papers on his desk as he sat. Once settled, he gave Claude a sour look. "I do not appreciate the haste the Ministry is forcing upon me and the parents of my students."

"Professor, the Muggle German army already invaded the north of France," Claude respectfully argued. "The Dark Army works with them to attack our world also."

The fussy professor looked like he had just sucked on a lemon. "That is no reason for this unseemly haste. We are not acting as the planning committee decided. We should reconvene the committee to discuss this before we move the students out to the wilds."

James used his Occlumency skills to keep from rolling his eyes at the comments of the Beauxbatons Headmaster. As a "junior Auror", he was not supposed to speak in these meetings. James found his patience getting stretched.

The conversation continued for another thirty minutes. Every time Claude attempted to discuss the evacuation of the students, the Headmaster resisted by citing the rules and regulations of Beauxbatons. James amused himself by predicting the time it would take for Claude to either explode or walk out of the room.

Realizing the meeting was going nowhere, James spoke for the first time in the meeting. "Pardon me, sir. May I suggest we look towards the defense of the school while the headmaster works through the proper channels to affect the proper response?"

Professor Laramee looked approvingly at James. "Well said, young man. I am pleased to see the British Ministry of Magic does understand the use of proper protocols." Then the Headmaster turned

to Claude. "Your young colleague is correct. You look to security and leave the students with the proper authorities."

Claude frowned at James and the Headmaster. He stood and nodded politely. "Headmaster." Then he walked out of the office.

James politely said good day to the Headmaster and followed the French Auror out of the office. Once out of the office and the door closed, Claude whirled on James.

"What are you doing?" he hissed. "We must evacuate the students!"

James gave Claude a half-smile. "We weren't getting anywhere with him. We wasted almost an hour." James gave Claude an innocent look. "Muggles have a saying, 'It is better to ask for forgiveness than permission'."

Claude looked at James with an incredulous expression. Then he started to laugh. "Your superiors allow this?"

James shrugged, "They have forgiven me so far. I have always looked on rules more like a guideline."

June 5, 1940

In short order the French Aurors acquired the complete student body list. Beauxbatons boasted a student body of 476, slightly larger than Hogwarts. The Aurors offered each student three choices. They could transfer to Hogwarts, new school in Wales, or the planned French magical enclave in Algeria.

Hogwarts currently had room for about 200 additional students in an empty tower. Professor Dippet said an additional 100 students could be accepted if they were willing to be Sorted into the Hogwarts Houses. The Wales School continued to build to accept additional students. Unlike Hogwarts, the Wales school resembled a Muggle university campus with separate classroom and dormitory buildings. The campus was more functional than pretty. No one had time to worry about landscaping and gardens in wartime. The Algeria enclave had no school per se. Rather they planned on the students

living with their parents and attending group lessons in student's homes.

The progress accelerated over the first day. Transfers to the British schools were on a 'first come, first served' basis. Much of the French Ministry would be moving to the Algerian enclave, but a surprisingly large percentage wanted their children sent to England.

The majority of the Beauxbatons students were assigned a evacuation location on June 3rd. Paris received a German wake-up call in the form of a flight of Luftwaffe bombers attacking key transportation points. A errant bomb landed just outside Palasis Royal. No real damage occurred to the building but it killed three MoM workers. The deaths seemed to wake up the magical community to the fact the Muggle war would affect their lives also.

The three hundred Hogwarts openings filled up first. Most students wanted to be placed in the Beauxbatons tower but they also accepted the offer to be Sorted into the Houses. The Wales school received 161 magical students and 80 squibs. The vast majority of the Welsh magical students were Muggle-born. The school's inclusion of Muggle subjects, like algebra and science, were seen as positives by the Muggle parents. (They could understand those subjects at least.)

The remaining fifteen students accompanied their parents into the Algerian enclave.

Once destinations were decided, the Aurors developed a timetable for the evacuations. The departures occurred from the Quidditch pitch. The stands were used to sort the students. A number of ropes were turned into Portkeys. Students were sent in groups of ten with their trunks shrunk in their pockets. A new group left via Portkey every ten minutes.

Things proceeded smoothly until lunch on June 5th. James and Claude watched the Ministry crews process the students for their evacuation. James was impressed by the orderly and calm manner of the students. Half of the students bound for Hogwarts had already been sent. If they stayed on schedule, all of the students would be in their new homes for dinner.

The disruption occurred when Professor Laramée arrived accompanied by several of his staff.

The small wizard started screaming as he approached. “Auror Delacour! I must protest! What have you been doing with my students?! We just finished writing the proper procedures! How can you be sending my students away?!”

“With their parents’ permission, of course.” Claude answered calmly.

“How do you know what we have planned? Who is meeting the students at the enclave? All of my staff is here!”

Claude gave a Gaelic shrug. “Only fifteen students chose to go to the enclave. Most went to Hogwarts and the rest to Wales.” He paused for a moment while the Headmaster looked stunned. “We will need to speak with your staff on what location we should send them.”

“How dare you! You send all of my students to the enclave immediately! I will have your position for this!”

Claude cut him off with a frosty glare. “We don’t have time to wait for you. The Germans started bombing Paris two days ago! Dark Army forces have attacked magical locations throughout France. Most of our Unspeakables are dead. The Ministry is already evacuating en masse.”

One of the professors sneered at Claude’s comments. “The cowards run.” The professor was a large, athletic looking man in his early forties, quite young for a wizard.

Claude glared at the man. “Cousin, the Unspeakables have lost 85 of their number. The rest fight to hold back the Dark Lord’s forces to buy us time. We squander their sacrifice while you whine. Help or get out of our way.”

James wanted to clap while the professor looked like he was ready to explode. Professor Laramée looked as irate as his professor did.

“How dare you speak to Professor Delacour in such a fashion! He is the greatest Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher in the whole of

Europe!” The fussy little professor looked like he was ready to blow a blood vessel. “I will not allow this! I am going to call the Minister!” The headmaster departed taking most of his staff with him.

Professor Delacour remained behind to glare at his cousin. “If those incompetents had done their job right, they would not be dead now!”

“Excuse me, professor,” James broke in with an innocent expression. “If they failed in their task because of incompetence, wouldn’t that mean they were never trained properly?”

The DADA professor looked shocked for a moment and then sneered at James. (James absently placed it at a six on the Malfoy sneer scale.) “Stupid boy, you are obviously just as hopeless as those incompetents. You have no appreciation for the subtle art of magical dueling.”

‘Wow,’ James thought, ‘this guy sounds more like Snape’s cousin than Claude’s.’

“Can’t say I ever had much use to the ‘subtle art of magical dueling’,” James replied with a shrug. “Too many rules.”

The professor sneered again, but James could see a hint of confusion in his eyes. With a final glare at Claude, the professor turned and left.

Claude waited until his cousin had left earshot and then roared with laughter. “That was great. Anton has been an arse all his life and has only gotten worse since he became a Dueling Master.”

“Do you think he could cause any trouble?”

Claude calmed a bit to answer. “No, he is all talk. Big words but he lacks the courage to backup his mouth. Once he actually has to do something he backs off.” The Auror looked at James. “Lets get the rest of the kids out of here and then we can start on the library.”

James nodded his agreement. The two wizards returned to their work.

As the Mediterranean sun set in the west, the last of the Beauxbatons students left their school. The last group consisted of the Head Boy and Girl and Sixth year prefects. They had assisted the Aurors in expediting the evacuation. (The Seventh year prefects were working the opposite process at Hogwarts and Wales.) A number of tears were shed in the time prior to leaving.

James noticed the students delayed their departure until sunset. Looking at the view, James thought, 'I can't blame them.'

"Wesley," Claude called James, "we are ready to start moving the library and other artifacts. Are they ready in Wales?"

"I sent them a note in the last group to Wales. They should be ready by now." James walked over to Claude. "Has the Headmaster started to help?"

Claude's response was lost in a deep clang of an alarm ward. Claude stopped in whatever his response was to look around.

The French Auror looked concerned. "That alarm announced that a number of wizards just Apparated beyond the school's wards."

"Dark Army or your Ministry after the Headmaster's complaints?" James asked.

Claude drew his wand while looking around. "Damned if I know. Either way it won't be good."

"Get the books and stuff out of here quickly," James told him. "I'll go see who our visitors are."

Claude shook his head. "I'll send one of the squads to check. With the students gone, I can spare some of them from transporting stuff."

"I'll go with them," James said. "My instinct says this has been going too smoothly."

Claude nodded. He turned and called out, "Red Squad, go check out the alarm! The rest of you, hurry up the transfer!" Turning back to James, he said, "Be careful."

James nodded and the two wizards clasped hands. "As soon as the stuff is Portkeyed away, get your people out of here." Then James moved to intercept the five members of Red Squad as they moved towards the school.

They entered the back of the school and moved towards the Grand Entrance Hall. The halls were quiet. With the students gone and half the staff already in England, the building stood empty. Even the house elves departed with the students. Only the Headmaster, Professor Delacour and the librarian had not left yet.

James quietly talked to the team leader and then walked towards the Headmaster's office. The squad continued towards the Apparition point to investigate.

James knocked on the Headmaster's door. "Professor Laramée? Professor Laramée? Are you in, sir?"

No one answered the door. Finding the door locked, James pulled out his wand. "*Alohomora*" The door remained locked. 'Why would he lock the door with more than a basic charm if we are evacuating the school?'

James cast a DoM spell to break the locking charms. The door slammed open causing an echoing clang down the empty hall. 'So much for subtlety.' James thought.

James entered the room. He stopped a pace in the door. The last time James entered this office it had all the hallmarks of housing a compulsively tidy professor. Nothing was out of place and no dust would dare to land anywhere in the room.

Now the desk was in disarray with filing cabinets standing half opened. A wardrobe in the corner lay on its side; the contents spilled out on the floor. Various items and books were strewn about the room. 'This is worse than Dumbledore's office after my Fifth year,' James thought, 'I only half destroyed it.'

James stepped cautiously into the room. Stepping towards the desk, James noticed a large pool of blood spread out on the floor. It was an

astounding volume of blood. James stepped carefully around the desk to prevent stepping in the blood.

Lying on the floor against the wall was the body of Professor Delacour. His wand arm, severed at the elbow, appeared to be the source of much of the blood. A number of other cuts and gashes appeared on his face, neck and chest. His other limbs showed signs of restraining curses. A snapped wand lay in front of the body.

James had seen a lot of death, but almost all of it had occurred from fighting. James could not understand this cold, deliberate act. Who would have wanted to kill the DADA professor? In James's experience, the DADA professor was usually the source of the trouble, not the recipient.

After casting a Suspension Charm on the body, James carefully left the office. The charm would retard the decay of both the body and any spell residue. Moody taught the spell to Harry the summer after Sixth year at the Order Headquarters. The reverse of the spell was useful in speeding the decay of Inferi.

James closed the door and sealed it with a locking charm. Changing into his bat form, James flew towards where the Aurors should be. The shadows of the empty, barely lit halls hid his progress.

Three minutes later, James found Red Squad. The team leader stood arguing with Professor Laramée. The other four members of Red Squad stood watching the argument. They stood inside the Entrance Hall near a side corridor. It appeared the Aurors met the Headmaster on the way to the main doors.

The headmaster insisted the alarm merely announced the arrival of a Ministry team to correct the errors of the Aurors. He was screaming at the team leader. "You fools have no concept of the consequences of your actions! You act without any thought of the future!"

The small bat-form hanging from a rafter emitted a tiny squeak that was lost in the sound of the argument. In the darkness past the professor and the Aurors, James could 'see' several figures approaching stealthily. 'Ministry officials would never approach like that,' James thought.

James released his grip on the rafter, dropping to the floor. At the proper height he reverted back to human form. In the darkness, the bat remained unseen so James would have appeared to a watcher to have silently Apparated into the hall. However, no one noticed his arrival as everyone concentrated on the argument.

James was about to step out of the shadows when a voice called out in a guttural, German accented French. "Drop you wands and surrender! You are trapped."

Professor Laramée turned to the sound of the voice. "You are too late, fools. The students and most of the library are gone." James started to be impressed by the defiant professor when he heard, "I told you to get here two days ago! I delayed them as long as possible but you took to long! When I report to the Dark Lord your inability to follow..."

The green light of the Killing Curse shot out of the shadows striking the ranting professor full in the chest. The wizard dropped limply to the floor.

"You are the one who failed. The Dark Lord told you none of the students or artifacts were to be allowed to leave." Although the voice now spoke in fluent French, James recognized the female's voice. It was Christina. "Aurors, you have one chance to live. Drop your wands now."

The Aurors seemed shocked by the sudden appearance of the Dark Army wizards and Professor Laramée's death. James decided he needed to intervene.

From the shadows, James called out in a mocking voice, "Christina, you spend way too much time sneaking into schools. If you keep it up, people will begin to talk."

"Who said that? Show your self!" a German wizard called out.

"When you set an ambush, one should always look for the counter-ambush. I mean really, didn't they teach you anything in evil wizard school?" came the response. "All of the little wizards are gone, so now you will have to take care of your own needs."

A low growl issued forth from the Dark Army wizards. They were getting angry from James's taunts. It was exactly what he wanted. Unfortunately, he was not the only one to recognize it.

"Ignore him!" Christina demanded. "He is trying to make you lose your temper and act stupidly." The witch stepped forward half a step. "You are by yourself. Otherwise you would have attacked without talking."

Again, the mocking voice, "Christina, you surprise me. You risk yourself by stepping forward. You become very bold."

"How do you know who I am?" she demanded.

James laughed and answered, "One of the ones you left behind at your last school talked before he died. We heard all about you. Tell me, do you even care about the wizards in your command or are they simply fodder for your little adventures?" James did not lie. Since the spellfuhrer still lived, he had talked before he died.

"How dare you!" shrieked Christina. Her long, curly brown hair seemed electrified in her anger.

James quickly threw two of his irreplaceable WWW items into the room. Both of them landed at Christina's feet. Pointing his wand, James cried, "Activate! Activate!"

The first filled the room with an inky darkness. Nothing else seemed to happen. James yelled out, "Red Squad, back up into the hall! Quickly!"

James heard the sound of quick steps and then the sounds of curses filled the air. Screams filled the air and then some splashes were heard. Then silence returned.

Ten seconds after the darkness appeared, the inky blackness faded. The bodies of three Aurors lay on the floor. Two appeared to be Killing Cursed. The other obviously had a crushed rib cage; probably a Bludgeoning Curse. Two of the Dark Army wizard lay motionless on the floor. The remaining two Aurors appeared to have fled out of the area.

Christina stood knee-deep in a WWW Portable Swamp. A lily pad hung off her head while her drenched robes hung on her like a sack. Even in the dim light, James could see the white fury on her face and the matching white knuckles on her hand gripping her wand. James almost died laughing. 'Fred and George would have loved this!'

"Watch that first step! It's a dozy!" James called out laughing.

Christina appeared too angry to give a coherent response. "You-, you-, you are a dead man!"

"Dark witches, no sense of humor! I wonder if you went Dark because of a lack of humor or lost it when you became Dark." James wondered aloud in a pondering tone. "It sounds like a great academic study."

One of the Dark Army wizards called out, "Who are you?"

James had slowly drawn Voldemort's wand from its sheath. With a sudden shout, he waved the wand in his left hand and called "*Accio dark wizards!*"

The three Dark Army wizards closest to the entrance hall flew over the portable swamp. While they were in flight, James fired three quick and silent Bludgeoning Curses. The curses caught them in mid-flight, slamming them against the wall. One unlucky wizard hit the corner. A crack was heard as his body smashed into the sharp corner edge.

This left James facing Christina and two wizards.

The look on Christina's face suddenly calmed. Then she started to smile. "Hello Count. It is nice to see you again."

"Hello Christina. I wish I could say the same. I keep find you breaking into schools."

Christina stepped out of the swamp and into the Entrance Hall. She glanced around. "You definitely have a unique style. It is so unorthodox. Who did you study under? I can't find any books that talk about it."

James laughed and answered with another truthful but misleading answer. "The wizard who could explain my style hasn't been born yet."

Christina looked annoyed at the non-answer. "Come Count, let us duel. I have so looked forward to this."

James laughed from the shadows. "Why should I fight now? The students are gone. So is the library and magical artifacts. Your mission has failed. I would have nothing to gain by fighting you now."

She placed her hands on her hips and pouted in James's direction. James smirked as he noted Christina had a very cute pout. She looked like Katie denied a second bedtime story. "We could see who is best!"

James smiled, "I outgrew the need to measure wand length years ago. Guten Tag, Christina."

"Wait!" Christina turned and cast two fast Stunners at the remaining Dark Army wizards. Then she lowered her wand, "Can I at least see what you look like?"

James was tempted but his caution won out. It was going to be a long war. He did not want Grindelwald's forces tracing the Count back to James Evans. His disguise was good but why take chances? "I am sorry, Christina. Maybe next time."

Suddenly, James felt a slight twinge in his scar. It was just a slight pull, but he felt it all the same. Now in a hurry, James said, "Until next time, Christina."

The pout appeared again. "Guten Tag, Count"

James stepped further into the shadows and quickly placed his wands back into their holders. Then he returned to his bat form. He flew back towards the Quidditch stands as fast as his wings could carry him. Once clear of the building, James paused to change into human form before changing to his wolf form. (The wolf was much faster over open ground.) As he passed the Quidditch pitch, he noticed that all of the Aurors were gone.

In a minute, James cleared the boundary of the Beauxbatons wards. He sprang into the air, reverting to human form and Apparated instantly.

James appeared on the outskirts of Hogsmeade in mid stride. He tumbled to the ground, rolled and came to be standing up. James pulled out his wand and dispelled the glamours hiding his true appearance. Then he cast the usual glamours he wore as James Evans. James ran the short distance to his house. As he reached his door, it swung open to reveal Tom standing inside with a pleased smile on his face.

“Dad! You got my message!”

James slid to a stop. “Tom, what is wrong? I felt something in my scar. Is it an emergency?”

Tom gave his dad a cheeky grin. “Mum went into labor. I figured you would want to be here.”

James felt a surge of excitement completely different to the battlefield adrenalin he had felt only minutes earlier. He quickly hugged his son and said, “Good call.” Then he hurried into the house.

Twin voices cried out , “Daddy!” as he stepped into the house. Katie and Michael ran over to wrap themselves in James’ legs. James squatted down and gave his children hugs.

Katie looked at James with a serious expression. “Daddy, Mummy said the new babies are coming to see us today. Are they coming through the Floo?”

James laughed at the innocent but serious question. Michael, the quieter of the twins, giggled at James’s expression. “Let me go see your mummy and I will find out for you.”

“Okay, daddy!”

Elizabeth Potter swept into the room. James was very glad to see his grandmother. Now he knew everything was under control.

“James! Perfect timing! Your wife was just asking for you. Go on in, she is waiting for you.”

James kissed his grandmother on the cheek and murmured his thanks. (Even after knowing her for almost five years, it still felt strange realizing he had grandparents now.) James moved to his bedroom door and knocked lightly. Then he opened the door.

Lying in the bed was a disheveled but still beautiful Sarah Evans. In her arms she held two bundles. She gave her husband a tired but radiant smile. “James! Say hello to your two beautiful new children, Ronald and Hypatia Evans.”

James smiled and moved to the side of the bed. He leaned over and kissed his wife. “You do beautiful work. And thank you for honoring my friends.”

Sarah smiled back. “I have heard all of your stories. They were your family growing up. I think it is the right thing to do. Here, take Ron. He won’t stop feeding.”

James lifted his infant son with a smile. “May be naming him after Ron was a bad idea,” he jokingly commented. Ron responded with a loud burp and rolled over to sleep.

A/N: I started writing this chapter as chapter 17. It felt like something was missing. I realized that I had moved too far ahead in the timeline and what really should have happened in chapter 17. So, instead of two spaced new chapters, you get one big serving!

Let me know what you think of naming the new kids for Ron and Hermione. I think the canon characters would both have liked the names.

I know some of you will be upset that James and Christina did not have their duel. I will just say the time wasn’t right ...yet.

Chapter 19 – Summer Discussions

7 July 1940

James drifted idly in the winds above Hogsmeade. The sun had just risen on a Sunday morning. No one else in the village below seemed to be awake yet. The twins finally slept through the night.

Already awake, James used the opportunity to pull his Firebolt out of his trunk. Flying on the current models didn't have the same thrill. The speed and maneuvering of the Firebolt was unmatched. He spent over an hour buzzing above Hogsmeade, the Forbidden Forest and Hogwarts. Relaxed after an adrenalin-charged hour of flying, James now let his broom hover as the winds blew him around.

James now had a full house. Two adults, at least five children and a house elf filled the house. James used magic to expand the house from three bedrooms to six, one master bedroom and one for each of the kids. Tom took a new room furthest away from the room used as the nursery. (Not that James blamed him. Two crying babies can make an awful lot of noise.) The older twins were each given a room but still slept in the same room anyway. They alternated rooms each night. Ron and Hypatia slept in the same nursery.

James was glad Tom was home from Hogwarts. Although the year had been a bit rough for Tom, he had enjoyed his classes and done very well in them. Much better than Harry Potter ever had done. Tom needed the chance to relax after the student politics and speculation of the last year. The almost three and a half year old twins bounced around the house full of energy. Harassing their older brother seemed to be their favorite game. Although Tom played the aggrieved brother well, James knew he enjoyed the twins immensely.

The scar told James how much Tom enjoyed the twins. Since his deliberate sending, more emotions leaked through the scar. It only occurred in a rather short range. When the twins and Snuffles decided to play in Tom's room, using his dumped-out school trunk as a hiding place, James had felt Tom's amusement even as he chased them out of his room. The only thing Tom seemed genuinely aggrieved about was the way Snuffles and Nagini signed on as willing accomplices.

Katie and Michael filled the house with sound. They knew the rules and were well behaved, but they still managed to find all kinds of chaos. When caught in their chaos, they would look at their mother with puppy-dog eyes and say, "But Mummy, you didn't say we couldn't..." James was not a big help in discipline because he usually fell for the eyes and laughed the offense away.

The twins also reached a division of labor. Katie was the idea person. Michael was the planner. He would take Katie's ideas and figure out how to do it. James wasn't really sure which twin was the dominate twin. It seemed to depend on the situation. Katie was still the show stealer, but Michael wielded a quiet power.

The new twins were cute, cuddly little babies. Hypatia had strawberry blond hair with James's green eyes. James could see a lot of his mother in her. Ron had his mother's blue eyes and the dark, unmanageable hair of the Potter men. Ron's hair also had hints of red highlights. That amused James a lot.

Hermione and Ron would have appreciated having the twins named for them. James thought Hermione would have enjoyed it the most. The original Hypatia was the last librarian of the Great Library of Alexandria. Murdered by an unwashed mob for Christian fanatics seeking to destroy the library for containing "pagan" knowledge, she became the unofficial patron saint of librarians. Hermione was never happier than with a book in her hand in a library. Hermione would have buried all of James's kids under a tidal wave of books.

The house also had several frequent visitors. The young Nott was at the house several times a week. Mary Greengrass and Laura Parkinson volunteered to help Sarah with the two sets of twins. Sarah cheerfully accepted their offer. Several of the Gdansk students whose families resettled in the area also were frequent visitors. That included Ela and Janek.

Sarah later confided to James that Mary and Laura's offer was an old Pureblood tradition to assist the mother of a boy one was interested in. James nearly choked on his tea hearing that news. Although he could not see much of Daphne and Pansy in their behavior, the image of his former schoolmates remained in his head. These girls

were probably their aunts in his original time. The thought just boggled his mind.

Realizing he was drifting further from the village and it would soon wake; James rolled into a dive and shot for home. Today was going to be a long day.

James and Tom arrived via Floo at Potter Manor in time for lunch in their usual manner. Elizabeth Potter found them sprawled out on the floor. She laughed at their entrance and then greeted them.

“James, Tom, it is so good to see you again.” Both received a hug and a kiss on the cheek. “How are the new twins?”

James smiled at his grandmother. “They slept through last night. It was Sarah’s first good night’s sleep in over a month.”

“Would she mind a visitor?”

Tom piped up. “I am sure the Terror Twins would appreciate you distracting Mum for a bit.”

“Tom Evans, how dare you say something like that about my darling godchildren?!” Elizabeth said in mock outrage. Then she chuckled, “They are a pair of adorable scamps.”

James smiled. “I am sure Sarah would like the visit.”

His grandmother smiled. “Then I will leave you boys to enjoy your lunch while I visit with your wife.” Then, with a kiss goodbye, she entered the Floo.

James and Tom walked into Thomas Potter’s study. He was sitting reading the Daily Prophet as they walked in.

“Elizabeth decided to go visit Sarah rather than join us.” James said as they walked in the door.

Thomas looked up with an oddly relieved expression on his face. “I am sure she will enjoy that.”

James sat in a chair and asked, "What is wrong, Thomas?" Tom sat on the couch without saying anything. He only looked nervously at the painting of the Founders.

Thomas sighed. He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. James knew he was playing for time. Thomas put his glasses back on and looked at his grandson. "Can we tell Elizabeth at least some of the truth about you?"

"Why now? What happened?"

Thomas grimaced. "A rumor is making its way through the Ministry that you are my illegitimate son. The fact you have the Potter hair adds credence to the rumor. They say it explains where your money came from and why we are close. The damn thing is the rumor is plausible! Even a Paternity Charm would show we are close relatives."

Now James felt anger mixed with concern, concern for his grandparents and anger at who ever started the rumor. "Elizabeth heard the rumors?"

"Yes, last week at a tea party. One of the Malfoy's 'accidently' commented on the rumor in her hearing." James's grandfather looked sad. "Elizabeth immediately defended us, but the rumors are getting to her. Telling her wouldn't make the rumors go away, but it will help her deal with them."

James nodded his agreement. "Okay, we can talk to her after lunch." He grinned briefly, "I think she has adopted my kids anyway." Then he sobered, "Who do you think started this rumor, the Malfoys?"

Thomas shook his head. "I'm not sure. I know the Malfoys don't like either of us. Acturus Black is another candidate."

James frowned, "I have tried not to annoy the Blacks." At Thomas's curious look James smiled. "I know most of the family is as dark as the inside of a boot, but my godfather was a Black and a good friend's mother was a Black. I tend to cut them a bit of slack. I actually like Melania Black. Tough woman. Actually a large bit of my money came

from the Black family. I inherited it from my godfather. He was the last Black of the direct line.”

Thomas looked shocked his grandson had a Black for a godparent. It didn't faze Tom as he knew the story already.

Tom cleared his throat. When the two older wizards looked at him he asked, “Can I talk to Salazar now?”

“Sorry, Tom. I know this is important to you.” Thomas Potter apologized.

Tom smiled nervously and stepped over to the painting.

The painting animated as he stepped forward. “Good afternoon, grandson.”

“Hello Salazar. I needed to talk to you.” Tom glanced back at his father nervously. James gave him an encouraging smile. He turned back to the painting. “It started to come out at school that I was your heir.”

Godric scowled, “James has told us about the Dark Army attack on our school. My wife would have been insulted that one of her students was behind such an attack.”

Salazar smiled slightly, “She did have a temper. Usually she took it out on you.” He turned back to his heir. “Has this caused a problem?”

“I handled it most of the year by dodging the question...”

Salazar frowned, “I sense a ‘but’ here.”

Tom nodded unhappily. “The last day the older students tried to force me to confirm the rumor. I got angry.” His voice dropped to an almost whisper as he added, “I almost lost control of my magic. I scared everyone, even my friends. They said my eyes glowed red.”

James's face went white at the news. The Voldemort's glowing red eyes still haunted his occasional dream. Hearing his son saying his eyes turned red in anger caused an eruption of conflicting feelings.

Concern and fear warred with hatred at the memory of Tom Marvolo Riddle. Realizing this would not help Tom, James started practicing his Occulemency exercises to settle his mind.

Salazar looked concerned also at Tom's revelation. "Sit down, Tom." Once Tom was seated, Salazar said, "I know we have talked about my curse and what it did to my descendants. I hoped your half blood status would protect you. I believe it has mitigated the curse, but not entirely."

Salazar stopped Tom before he could interrupt. "I am not saying there is no hope. Aside from your Muggle father, your magical father has also given you protections. You are the first of my line raised in a Light household." Salazar gave James a sly look. "James may be a bit grey in his magic, but he is pure Light in his intent. He proves my point there is no color in the magic itself, only in the intent. He would have made an excellent Slytherin."

Godric looked offended at his friend. "Stop trying to steal my Gryffindors!"

Salazar snorted but looked at Tom, "You have two choices, heir. You can take the easy path. The magic of the curse will use your anger to drive you into the path of our line. Or, you could choose the hard path, to fight the magic and follow James's path."

"How long will I have to fight it?"

"To some extent, your entire life. However the key will be when you turn 17. The curse will attempt to bend you as you reach your majority. If you resist it and win, it will diminish and fade into the background."

In a quiet, but clear voice Tom said, "I don't want to be Voldemort."

James moved to sit next to his son. "What can I do to help?"

"Continue as you have. Be strong for him." Salazar paused for a moment. "I noticed you practiced an Occulemency exercise while Tom and I talked. Teach him. The exercises on controlling his

emotions will help him resist the pull of the magic. Family and friends can support him in this fight but only he can fight this.”

James placed his arm around the shaken Tom. “We will all help you, Tom. Remember, we all have a dark side we have to fight. Your’s is just magically enhanced. But you have to resist the temptations.”

The thirteen year-old wizard leaned into his father’s shoulder. “Like you did when you gave your cousin the potion to turn him into a killer whale?” he murmured.

James chuckled, “Not my best example. But I never hurt him with my magic.”

Thomas walked over and kneeled in front of Tom. “Tom, Elizabeth and I are your family too. If you need help or just to talk about this, we are here for you.”

“Thank you,” Tom said.

James and Tom arrived home with Thomas Potter. They found Sarah and Elizabeth sitting in the kitchen with Ron and Hypatia. Ron was nursing while Tia lay on Elizabeth’s shoulder. Sarah looked surprised to see them, Elizabeth less so. James was saddened to see the look of doubt in her eyes.

“I didn’t expect to see you boys for hours. What are you doing home so soon?” Sarah asked.

“I think we all need to talk,” James said while pulling out a chair.

Tom looked uncomfortable. “I am going to work on my Potions homework.” James smiled his agreement of Tom’s escape.

Thomas sat down opposite his wife looking a bit green. Elizabeth started to look more nervous.

James reached over and took his grandmother’s hand. “Elizabeth, Thomas told me about the rumors. I want you to know they are not true in their intent.”

Elizabeth looked confused over the statement. Sarah looked just plain confused. James turned and gave Sarah an update on the rumors. Then she looked murderous.

“James, if you don’t tell her, then I will!”

James raised a consoling hand and smiled at his wife. “Easy, love. That is why we’re here.” He turned back to Elizabeth. “To the best of my knowledge, Thomas has always been faithful to you. However, I am a Potter.”

“Thomas didn’t have any brothers,” Elizabeth started unsurely.

James smiled, “I am not his son, I am his grandson and yours. I traveled magically back through time to change history.” Now she looked stunned. Over the next hour, James told her why he came back

“A Dark Lord killed my unborn son and his wife?”

James nodded. “I came here to stop him.”

“Was it Grindelwald?”

A voice from the hall interrupted. “No, it was me.” Tom walked into the kitchen with a grim face. Tear tracks lined his cheeks.

“Tommy?” Elizabeth Potter asked in a stricken tone.

Tom nodded. “If Dad hadn’t have pulled me out of the orphanage, I would have gone Dark. I’m sorry, Mrs. Potter.”

Elizabeth removed her hand from James and wrapped it around Tom while being careful with the sleeping Tia. Tom started to sob into her shoulder. “Tom Evans, you have nothing to be sorry for. You never did those things. I hope if I have a son he would be just like you.”

The thought of what she just said shot through her. She looked at her husband. “We are going to have a son?” she asked in an excited whisper.

Thomas grinned, "So our grandson told me. He won't say when. But that *is* our great-granddaughter on your shoulder."

Elizabeth's face lit up at that reminder.

29 July 1940

"Clear your mind"

Tom sat in the middle of the mat in his father's dueling room. "How am I supposed to do that?"

"Good question, my first Occulemency teacher would say that and then batter at my mind. Never did me much good." James's light-hearted comments ignored the thoughts of where that poor training led to for Harry and Sirius.

"Pick a mental image that you find restful. Hold it in your mind. Focus only on the picture."

Tom tried to picture Hogwarts. He focused on the castle but thoughts about classes and the pressures there kept bubbling up. "I can't hold it, Dad."

"Try another image. This will take time. I only met one person how ever mastered this on the first try." James chuckled, "And trust me, Luna was unique."

Tom changed his image to the Hogwart's lake. He pictured the lake with a gentle wind blowing across the water. Stray thoughts kept wandering in but not nearly as many as before. Images of Mary, Laura and Ela kept appearing at the lake.

"Relax, Tom," he heard his father's voice say. "Let the image go. Open your eyes."

Tom blinked his eyes open. It took his eyes a moment to adjust. "Could you enter my mind?"

James grinned, "I didn't try. Our primary reason here is to assist you in controlling your emotions. We are not in a hurry to build your

shields. I probably could have entered but you did a good job of clearing your mind. You sat there for twenty minutes. I am impressed. It took me a week to get to twenty minutes.”

“Why did it take you so long?”

James sat quietly for a moment. “It was a very difficult time for me. Emotionally, I was up or down, there were no in-betweens. The war was picking up and Voldemort was constantly angry. My scar was in constant pain.”

Tom didn’t know what to say.

“Tom, Salazar told you fighting the curse will cause you pain. It seems the right path for both of us is filled with pain, all kinds of pain.” James looked at his son in all but birth. “I wish I could help you avoid that pain. These exercises may help you manage the pain, but you will still feel it. I am not just talking about physical pain, the mental pain may be worse.”

“Worse then the physical?” a nervous looking Tom asked.

“How did you feel when your House isolated you? Would you call that painful?” James paused, looking at something only he could see. “Your mother and I, your brothers and sisters, your grandparents, and many of your friends will be there to support you. But when you come to moments of decision, you will be all alone. Only you can decide what is right for you and what you believe.”

“You will be a very powerful wizard. People in our community look to the more magically powerful for leadership. If you want it or not, you will be looked at as a leader. You already are within your circle of friends.

“How will leadership cause me pain?” Tom asked.

“You get credit for the victories, but you also take full blame of the defeats,” James answered. “At the end of my Fifth year, a vision from Voldemort told me my godfather was in danger. I tried to let some adults know but when that failed, I led my friends into a battle. Four Fifth years and two Fourth years fought almost a dozen Death Eaters.

We held them off until help arrived. All of my friends were hurt and my godfather died coming to rescue me.”

“In many ways, the battle turned into a victory for our side. But the loss of my godfather and the injuries to my friends almost destroyed me. The pain was almost unbearable. Other things added to it. There were times I thought of running away, leaving the war. Or I could have joined Voldemort. He offered several times.”

Tom looked shocked at that revelation.

James smiled. “I was never really tempted. Voldemort was not wrong about everything. The Wizarding world is stagnant. They were so superior to Muggles for a very long time and they lost the drive to innovate. In his hatred of Muggles, Voldemort saw the answer as suppression and subjugation of the Muggles. I think the onus is on the magical to stay in front of the Muggles in development.”

Tom nodded, “So you agreed on the issue, but not the approach?”

“Essentially, yes.” James decided to change tracks. “How many students are there at Hogwarts without the European students?”

“Um, about 400.”

James nodded, “According to Professor Dippet, you started last year with 420. When I attended Hogwarts we had about 250. This war and Voldemort’s combined to kill off too many of the young wizards and witches before they had families. Also Voldemort succeeded in killing off many of the Muggle-borns before they were even trained. Even though we ‘won’ the war, there was still a very good chance that the magical community in Britain was already too small to survive.”

Tom looked shaken at the news that his alternate self may have succeeded in destroying the magical world.

James said, “Now, focus on your image. Clear your mind. Set everything I just told you aside. Clear your mind.”

Tom looked at his dad as if he had gone spare. How could he clear his mind after hearing all of that?

“I told you it would not be easy. Now focus! Let the image come back. Push everything aside.”

Tom concentrated on his father’s directions. After several minutes of effort, Tom could feel the stray thoughts ending.

Then his father’s voice seemed to come out of nowhere. “If you succeed in this, we will start your Animagus training too.”

Tom felt a shot of excitement shoot through his system. Speculations about his animal form started appearing in his mind. Tom realized his efforts at clearing his mind were falling apart.

Finally, Tom opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a grinning James. “I’ve said it before, you are evil.”

James laughed. “You need to hold your concentration even when other things are occurring. You need to pay attention to them but not release your focus.” James rose to leave. “Practice alone for a while. I will test you later to see how well you can hold it.”

Tom smiled, “Okay Dad. I’ll try to be ready for you.”

James grinned, “Do or Do not. There is no try.” Then he left Tom trying to figure out where that came from.

August 1, 1940

James and Sarah entered a conference room in a secured area of the MoM’s Department of Mysteries. The conference room was deep within the DoM and looked like any other department. The secure nature of the area meant the Unspeakables did not have their charms and cloaks to hide their identity.

The couple were here today for a very special meeting. The discussion would center on the efforts to prevent James from returning to his original time. The Unspeakable Kay spent the last 13 months researching the topic along with Professor Dumbledore and others within the department. Now they would hear their findings.

James and Sarah entered the room to find Professor Dumbledore, Kay, and Mr. Abel already there. After greeting them, James asked, "So what is the bottom line?"

"We estimate a 90 likelihood you will be able to stay here, Count, but at a cost," Kay answered.

"Cost?" Sarah asked.

Albus nodded unhappily. He looked at James with a rather familiar expression of concern. "We have not been able to determine a way to separate the Time Turner's recharging from James's core. With the device not really existing here, it makes it very difficult for us to work on."

"But you have figured out a way?" Sarah asked the question but it sounded more like a statement. James could feel the anxiety in his wife's voice. He reached over to squeeze her hand. She gave him a wane smile in reply.

James looked at Kay. "What have you come up with?"

"Professor Dumbledore and his research partner discovered a method of weakening a wizard's connection to their magical core. With enough of the potion it can almost completely sever the connection. We theorize that by weakening your connection the Time Turner will pull your core back to your starting time while leaving you here."

James looked shocked. "Pull my core forward? What will that do to my magic?"

Abel spoke for the first time. "Best case scenario is you will be a squib. You will age like a Muggle. If you are still alive in 1998, your magic will return to you."

"He'll be a squib?" Sarah asked in a small voice.

"Artificially, yes." Kay confirmed. "The potion contains dragon blood and several other components. It is a very toxic mixture. It will taste horrible but have no major short-term effects. It will probably cause

some long-term health issues, such as an increased likelihood of heart failure and stroke.” Kay looked down, “I would not expect you to live to see your magic return.”

Sarah took on her Healer role. “What are the short-term effects?”

Kay shrugged, “The biggest one is..., well, lets just say it is a good thing you already had kids. Increased headaches would be the most noticeable of the short-term effects.”

James didn’t hesitate. “Fine, let’s do it.”

Sarah looked at James and asked, “Are you sure? That is a lot to give up?”

James smiled, “You and the kids need me here. Magic or no magic, I am not going to leave my kids to grow up without a father.” James shrugged, “Besides, I have no idea what that future would look like anyway. I know I have caused a number of changes already that will radically change the future, aside from what my mission would have done anyway.”

The others looked interested by that statement.

“What do you mean, James?” Albus asked.

James shrugged, “You mean aside from a Dark Lord not trying to take over in the 1970’s? I know Hogwarts never hosted European students in my history. I slept through a lot of History of Magic, but not that much. People who died will live and have children I never knew. People may end up married to different people then I knew. What if my parents never get together? Or they don’t have a son at the right time?”

Kay nodded, “From our experiments, you will still return to the time you left, even if you were never born in that ‘now’.”

Remembering his brief encounters with Dudley’s few fantasy novels, James asked, “A different dimension?”

The Unspeakable shrugged, "We are not sure. The R&D wizards are still arguing about it. When you are 'in' the time, how can you tell? We already know you can change history. We don't know if the prior timeline continued from where you left or it ended when you made your first change here."

James chuckled, "I guess that was when I bought my house." Sarah smiled slightly and Albus chuckled, but the rest seemed to consider the issue. James asked, "What about the Sorting Hat's comments about Ravenclaw's research."

Kay frowned, "I wish something of the research still existed. We can not prove her theory. However, your changes to the timeline may effect some people options, but not necessarily the thinking of people not directly interacting with you."

"So, if I went back something like who the Minister of Magic is may not be changed?" James asked.

"Possibly, yes."

James smiled at Sarah, "Well, that settles the question. There is no way I am taking the chance of going back to deal with that idiot again."

Abel and Kay laughed at James's comments. Abel asked in a disbelieving tone, "More of a politician then Nott?"

"No," came the answer, "just vastly more incompetent!"

Kay pulled a notebook onto the table. "This is the research I have done over the last year with Professor Dumbledore. Review it and let me know if you have any questions. The potion formula is in there as well. If you still want to go through with it, we can have a DoM Potion Master brew it."

Sarah shook her head. "No, if anyone is going to brew it, I will. I won't trust someone else with this kind of thing, not for James."

Albus looked at Sarah with a twinkle in his eyes, "I think we can understand that, my dear. James, I wish you good luck." The

Transfiguration professor stood. "James, would you be willing to practice dueling with me? I suspect my old friend is not yet done with attaching Hogwarts."

"That sounds like fun, Albus. Maybe we can teach each other." Dumbledore smiled and left.

Abel turned to Kay and asked, "When would I lose my most effective field agent?"

Kay acted offended but answered, "Same time you would have if the Time Turner had pulled him back. Count, you arrived in June of 1934, right?" At James's nod she said, "I would not send him out after June of '43."

Abel looked shocked, "A whole year early?"

"The Count has one of the strongest cores in DoM record. Like Professor Dumbledore, he is off our ability to accurately measure. One of our researchers suggested his stronger core might recharge the device faster than a normal wizard. The difference in wizard cores is probably why the return period was so inaccurate. I don't think you want the Count in the field when his magic leaves him." Then she shrugged, "However another of the dungeon rats is arguing that the Count's high level of magic use is slowing the recharge by preventing it from being available for the Time Turner. We really can't tell. The only thing that will settle the argument is when it actually happens."

Abel looked profoundly disturbed by that news, although James couldn't tell if it was due to the thought of losing him early when he was still usable or him being in the field when it happened.

Sarah took the notebook and started glancing through it. James could feel how unhappy she was. In an odd way it felt very nice to have her so concerned for him.

James stood up. "Thank you for the time and effort you have put into this, Kay. Please pass that on to your dungeon rats also." After saying their goodbyes, James and Sarah returned to their Hogsmeade home.

12 August 1940

Tom and Nott lay on the ground in the Nott garden. Overhead they watched a flight of British Royal Air Force (RAF) Spitfires dueling with twice their number of Nazi aircraft. Nott Manor stood near the coast in near the village of Camber. It lay on one of the shortest approaches between the Nazi airfields in France and London. No raids had reached central London yet, but the industrial areas outside the city were already taking a pounding.

The young wizards watched the aerial battle in a bit of awe. It was Nott's first real exposure to the Muggle world's weapons. He was amazed at the Muggle machines flying faster than any broom knocking each other out of the sky. Neither boy truly understood the human cost of the events unfolding above their heads.

Since the Battle of Britain started more than a month ago the southeast of England was crawling with British Muggle soldiers. They were preparing to resist any German attempts at invasion across the Channel. They also picked up downed English and German pilots. Two weeks ago, a German pilot landed inside the Muggle Repulsion charms set on the Nott Manor. It was weird to see his struggles to prevent landing on the grounds. The boys could see his expression of fear and disgust as he landed. Although he broke his leg on impact, he dragged himself off the grounds to a nearby field where a patrol picked him up. Neither the pilot nor the patrol noticed the manor standing a short distance away.

Watching the battle, Nott casually asked, "What are you going to do about the older students next year?"

"Hmm?"

"What are you going to do about the 'Heir of Slytherin' thing?" Nott asked more directly.

Tom groaned silently. He had been dreading this question all summer. "Why should I do anything about it?"

Nott sat up to look at the wizard he viewed as being his only true friend at Hogwarts. Being friends with the girls was nice, but Nott felt

he could tell Tom anything. Unlike the rest of their House, and indeed most of the magical community, Tom never asked for favors or made up to him because of his family. Tom accepted him simply as Ed Nott. However, he did think his friend thought everyone else was a bit dense.

“Tom, I know you really are the Heir. I was pretty sure before First year ended. You were a little too smug about some of your challenges on the way the students talked about Slytherin. You talked about things that were never in any books.”

“Maybe I made it up.”

Nott snorted and lay back, “You’re not that good a liar, and again, too smug. Also the fact you never flat out denied it. You plan to go public one day but don’t want to do it yet.”

Now Nott felt Tom sit up. He could feel the other boy’s glare and ripples of magic. Without looking at Tom, Nott said, “Relax, Tom, I didn’t tell anyone. I won’t tell.”

After several seconds, the magic pulled back. “Why not?”

“You mean ‘Why me’ or ‘Why won’t I tell on my best mate?’” Nott asked semi-factiously.

Tom rolled his eyes at the pun. “I know a lot of the House would love to know. Telling them would carry a lot a favors.”

Ignoring the question, Nott commented, “I hate the image our House has. ‘Slytherins will sell their mother for a Galleon’. Or we all lie, cheat and steal to achieve our ambitions. Yes, we have had more then our fair share of Dark wizards, but Grindelwald is a Ravenclaw for Merlin’s sake! Their House doesn’t get smacked for it. If you are an ambitious Light wizard, you hide your Slytherin roots as fast as you can once out of Hogwarts.”

“You want me to clear the Slytherin name.” Tom said in a flat tone.

“Nope,” Nott said with a smile. “You want to do that, snake-boy. I just want to help. I think you are going to start the biggest revolution in the Wizarding world since the Founders decided to start a school.”

Tom let out a barking laugh, “Typical Slytherin, wave a rebellion in their face and they come running.”

“You laugh, but it’s true. I bet you ten Galleons that when you go public the majority of the House lines up behind you.” Nott noticed a sour expression come to Tom’s face at that comment.

Both boys lay in silence for the next 20 minutes, both lost in their own thoughts. The dogfight overhead had long since ended unnoticed.

“I am the last descendant of Slytherin, Nott.”

A snort, “Not for long if Mary or Laura get a hold of you. Watch out for Xurana and Ela too.”

Nothing else was said for a few more minutes. Then Tom said, “I am going to need your help.”

“Name it, but I am getting you a date.” A pebble smacked into the side of Nott’s head.

Tom sat up. Nott sat up and faced him with a smile. Then he noticed Tom’s serious face.

“Did you ever wonder why Slytherin went Dark?” Tom asked.

Nott just shrugged. That was like asking, “Why is water wet?” or “Why do we have magic?” It just was.

Tom told Nott the story he heard from Salazar’s portrait. He left out the prophecy and his father’s role in it. He explained about the accidental magic damage that turned the original Slytherin Dark. How it had passed on to all of his heirs.

“Remember at the end of the year, my eyes turning red?” Nott nodded. It was not something he could bloody forget. “We think that was the Darkness stepping forward. For generations my family only

inter-married. It reinforced the curse.” Tom frowned and added, “It also made them a bunch of ugly prats.”

Tom looked in his friend’s eye. “Two things might help me from going Dark. One is the fact I am Half-Blood. My Muggle side helps counter the reinforcement of the curse. The second thing is I am the first Slytherin raised in a Light house since Salazar. My family knows all of this. They will support me. But they can’t be at school with me.”

Nott nodded. That explained one reason Mrs. Evans took the position as Healer for the expanded Hogwarts. Then he answered Tom’s unspoken question. “I will help you, Tom.” Nott laughed. “I probably would have followed you into the Dark. Do you realize the presence you have? Even when they isolated you, the rest of the House still saw you as a leader.” He looked slyly at Tom, “That really annoys Dolohov and Mulciber.”

Tom smirked in response. “Now that won’t upset me.”

“Do any of the teachers know? I know ‘Sluggo’ isn’t sure what to make of you.”

Tom grinned at Slughorn’s nickname. “No, he doesn’t. Only Professor Dumbledore knows. He promised to keep it to himself. He has worked with my father and I this summer to help me resist the impulses. They gave me exercises in Occlumency to help me shield my mind.”

Nott noticed a mischievous smile on Tom’s face “What is so funny?”

“Dad keeps coming up with ways to distract me while I am supposed to be focusing. He threatened to get one of the girls to kiss me. One day he did it. I went into shock when I felt someone kiss my cheek. I expected to see Mary or Laura. It was Katie. I almost died. My sister thought it was the funniest thing.”

“So why the smile?”

“I think we need to think of a proper revenge,” Tom answered.

Nott grinned back. He liked Mr. Evans. When he was home he would play Quidditch with them or help them with their dueling skills. He also had a great sense of humor. "You know, snake-boy, I think we have an important way of help you release your Darker impulses."

Tom looked at him with a questioning glance. "Really."

Nott nodded happily. "Pranks. With the French students, Hogarts will have over 800 students. They will need something to keep entertained. I think we can provide it." Nott assumed a righteous expression. "And of course, if we get caught, we can tell Dumbledore you are working out your impulses." Then he ruined it with a cheeky grin, "Probably won't even get detention. Instead of being a Dark Lord, you can become a Prank Lord."

Tom started to laugh. He looks for help with a serious problem and his best mate prescribes pranks. When he thought about it, the idea did have merit. It was better then sulking in his dorm room. Then inspiration set in.

"Mr. Nott, I believe I know the perfect way to get my Dad and set ourselves up as the ultimate pranksters."

Nott grinned, "Do tell."

Tom started explaining the first mission of their formal pranking career, the liberation of the Marauders Map. After all, it was made for pranking. Keeping it out of the establishment's hands was a responsibility of all pranksters. And Dad was the establishment now, wasn't he?

"Do we get a name too?" Nott asked.

"How about the Rebels?" Tom suggested.

Nott shook his head. "La Revolution. With a bit of luck Dippet will think it is the French students. He'll be reluctant to investigate them too hard."

Tom laughed in admiration. "Now that is Slytherin thinking!"

Laughing the boys started plotting pranks for the coming year. The serious reason for the pranks was left behind. Only the laughter filled the garden now.

At the same time in Germany, a meeting was ending. A medium sized wizard with brown wavy hair turning to grey. He had a pleasant, neighborly face. In another time, one would have said he looked like a happy computer geek. The wizard sat with a group of his closest advisors. The meeting room sat atop the tallest tower of Dumstang. The school itself sat on a small mountain. The towers height gave a perfect panoramic view in all directions. (Magic kept the cold and the winds out.)

“Christina, you have failed me twice now.”

“I am sorry, milord. The British resistance was stronger than we expected. The Count stopped us both times,” the Dark witch answered in a respectful tone.

The Dark Lord leaned easily back in his chair. “Yes, the Count, he has been a thorn in my side. Losing Professor Laramée is a great blow to my plans. His studies of the forbidden arts almost matched my own. His failure to prevent the students escape and the loss of the magical materials at Beauxbatons has damaged my plans.”

“Milord,” an advisor asked, “what do we need with school children?”

“Not children, teenagers,” the Dark Lord corrected him. “I need magical teenagers. They strike a balance between magical power and innocence. A child may have more innocence but they lack the magic to power the ritual.” No one asked what ritual the teenagers were needed for.

Albert Grindelwald turned back to Christina. “Have you had any luck finding Gaunt’s nephew?”

“Not yet, milord. He never mentioned the boy’s name or his father’s name. He only mentioned his ‘squib’ sister running off, marrying a Muggle, and having a son.”

"I don't blame her," a wizard commented. "I was only around him for ten minutes and I was ready to run."

The Dark Lord nodded his agreement. Unlike Voldemort, Grindelwald was not a "mad-dog". He was a ruthless killer, but saw no reason for excessive unpleasantness. Kill a man and be done with it. No need to be uncivilized. His inner circle gave the appearance more as an academic discussion group. However, the entire circle knew the cost of repeat failures.

"I agree, Tomas. But we need that boy. Slytherin's Chamber of Secrets is possible the greatest untapped Dark resource in the world. We need him to open it for us." The Dark Lord turned to his newest inner circle member. "Use your connections in the British Ministry to trace this Slytherin Heir. And find me the Count."

Acturus Black nodded his agreement. "As you say, milord."

A/N: I think this was the fastest chapter I've written in this story. It answers some questions, but opens others. No action but it sets the stage. 18 pages in less than a week! Hope you enjoyed!

Chapter 20- Third Year Adjustments

1 September 1940

Tom sat very still inside the bush. He used his Occulmency lessons to calm himself and stay patient. His target would be coming around the corner soon. Without moving, he braced his muscles to spring into action.

A huge weight crashed into the teenage wizard, throwing him out of the bush. He rolled as his father taught him, but his intended victim pounced on the prone wizard. Tom tried to scramble away but a large weight settled on him preventing any movement.

Then the target started his revenge. Unable to defend himself, Tom watched his fate approach with open fear. Tom closed his eyes and attempted to turn from his attacker's vengeance.

The huge, cold, wet tongue started licking at the bottom of the trapped boy's jaw line and proceeded straight up to his hairline. The attack repeated several times, getting his eyes, nose and inside an ear in the process.

"Snuffles, stop it!" Tom yelled in disgust. "Come on, stop it!"

Snuffles stopped and gave the boy a doggie grin. The situation was not helped by the hissing laughter coming from inside the bush.

Nagini, you are supposed to be my familiar! Tom hissed at the snake.

The magical cobra slithered out into the open. *Your ambush failed, young snake. It is a learning experience.*

A little girl's giggle startled Tom. Katie and Michael stood behind Tom watching Snuffle's licking attack. Tom noticed his Mum standing behind them covering her mouth to prevent laughing aloud. Ron and Tia slept soundly in their stroller. Tom realized it was inevitable his dad would hear about it.

Tom pulled himself up, brushing himself off. He mock glared at his giggling siblings. "So, you think that is funny?"

The twin terrors smiled and nodded. In his quiet voice, Michael said, "Nagini sounded like Da."

Tom looked at the twins in surprise. "Can you understand what Nagini says?"

The twins nodded. Katie said, "Nagini talks to us when we play outside. He keeps the bad things away." Any of her other comments were distracted by the sight on Michael climbing astride Snuffles for a ride. Katie took off to climb on too.

Tom noticed his mother looked as shocked as he felt. He never realized his siblings were Parcelmouths also.

Sarah Evans shook of her surprise and grinned at her oldest son. "You better watch what you hiss under your breath from now on, Tom. I may not catch you but..." Her grin grew larger at Tom's grimace.

"Does Dad know about this?" Tom asked. He stood up and brushed off the dust from his school robes.

Sarah gave an amused shrug. "Who knows? Your father is very good at keeping secrets. I think he does it sometimes just out of habit." Changing the subject, she asked, "Aren't you supposed to be at the train station?"

"The Express is supposed to get here in an hour. My trunk is already there. The Shaw sisters said they would watch it," Tom answered.

Sarah said, "We will walk you back to the station. You should be there when it arrives."

Tom and his mum talked for a bit as they walked through Hogsmeade. The Evans family was a familiar sight in the village. No one blinked at the image of the twins following their mother and older brother riding on a pony-sized dog.

In a departure from the past, magical students from Hogsmeade and Scotland were meeting the train at Hogsmeade Station. Although the train magically expanded to hold large numbers of students,

Professor Dippet and the Ministry was concerned about the huge number of students arriving at King's Cross

In addition to the Beauxbatons students, Hogwarts would also be hosting a number of students from other European countries. Students from Greece, Austria, Yugoslavia and the Low Countries joined the French and Polish students as the new international contingent at the magical school. Hogwarts now housed just over 900 students, more than doubling from when Tom arrived for his First year.

The now-officially titled Welsh Institute of Magic and Technology hosted about 600 students. Operated by the Phoenix Foundation, the Welsh School included classes on Muggle science and technology. Completely privately funded, the Welsh school looked like a modern (for the 1940's) English university campus. A modified set of Muggle-repealing wards had been placed on the campus. Muggles could see the school and remember it, but would fail to notice all but the most blatant use of magic. The Quidditch pitch lay in a hollow behind the school buildings. The top of the stands only stood six feet above the rim of the hollow. Fifty foot-tall magically grown trees ringed the grounds behind the school preventing direct observation.

Since Hogsmeade was the only purely magical village in Britain, the local village for the Welsh school was about 50 magical now. A large number of Squibs also moved into the area to support the school in various shops. The previous residents of the village generally welcomed the newcomers. The new school and shops helped generated a great deal of money for the village. They found their new neighbors a bit odd but put that off, as they were mostly foreigners with strange customs.

Tom heard some of the Muggle-born students invited to Hogwarts this year decided to attend the Welsh school instead. Their Muggle parents could more easily understand some of the classes and material the new school would be teaching. No existing Hogwarts students left for the new school.

Tom thought about the conversation he over heard between his father, Professor Dumbledore and 'Uncle Thomas'. The professor was teasing James about being 'the competition'. James shrugged.

"Maybe Hogwarts needed it. It has been getting a bit dated."

Dumbledore looked offended, "Hogwarts provides the best magical education in the world, James. I don't believe whoever ran the school when you attended would have let it slip that much!"

James grinned at his former (future) Headmaster. He resisted commenting on his Hogwarts experience but said, "Magical, yes, Albus, but what about the non-magical?"

"You really think we need the Muggle sciences that strongly?" Thomas Potter asked.

James answered, "The science is a good idea, but what about a simple English class? I've read some of the student papers you get, Albus."

Dumbledore laughed in a delighted tone. "Learning to decipher student papers is required skill for all Hogwart's teachers."

"The Hogwart's curriculum has not changed almost a thousand years. A fifth of Britain's population in the Founders' Time was magical. Now we are one out of a hundred. As Muggle medicine improves, we will be one in five hundred but the end of this century. We can't afford to ignore the Muggles anymore."

The conversation continued for hours. Tom wandered away after Professor Dumbledore asked if his summer Transfiguration homework was completed. The conversation stayed with Tom and he thought about the implications several times throughout the summer.

The Hogwarts Express rolled into the station exactly on time. The students were assigned to the cars by year. Mr. Ogg pulled the First years out of the mass of students and led to the boats. The black Hogwarts robes mixed with the Gdansk's green, Beauxbaton's blue, and the colors of other schools in occupied Europe. Tom admitted it

did make things more interesting than the sea of black one normally saw at Hogwarts.

“Tom!”

Tom turned to see Nott making his way through the crowd. The rest of the Slytherin Third years followed along except for Dolohov and Mulciber. Evan Rosier tagged along behind the girls.

Tom started to make his way over to his friends when a stream of First year students appeared in his path. It was like a river of black in his path. Tom was about to attempt to ford this flood of Firsties when he was almost knocked to the ground. As he fell, a shovel-sized hand grabbed his arm.

“Ahm sorry ‘bout that. Didn’t see you there. All right then?” a deep bass voice asked.

Tom felt a moment of anger at the First year that plowed into him. He looked over, ready with a cheeky comment. Then he realized he was looking at the younger boy’s chest. Tom looked up at the First year, and up. Tom realized the boy stood at least six and a half feet tall.

“Merlin, I think you set the record for the tallest First year in the history of Hogwarts.”

The smile and enthusiasm on the boy’s face was open and innocent. “Sorry ‘bout that. Excuse me, I’ve gotta go catch up! I heard we have to fight dragons to get into our Houses!” Then with a huge stride, the giant First year chased after the rest of his new classmates with a puppy’s excitement.

“Bloody hell, I hope he doesn’t play Beater!” Nott said stepping next to Tom.

Mary laughed, “I don’t know if they make a broom big enough. Gryffindor or Hufflepuff?”

“He’d never make it in Slytherin,” Rosier commented. “He was too happy and polite.”

“Sounds like a ‘puff then,” Xurana said. “They are all happy pushovers.”

“You have met my mother haven’t you?” Tom snorted. “Besides, he seemed way too excited over the idea of fighting dragons. Definite Gryffindor.”

Xurana blushed. She had learned over the summer Mrs. Evans was a kind, cheerful witch, but don’t get on her bad side. “Honestly Tom, she should have been in Slytherin. She could intimidate anyone.”

Tom laughed at the idea of his mum intentionally intimidating anyone. She just would not be moved from what she thought was right.

The group fell in with the rest of the students moving to the carriages. Tom and Nott ignored the thestrals pulling the carriages. They had seen them last year leaving school. Professor Dumbledore warned them before leaving school.

Tom watched the new foreign students getting their first glimpses of Hogwarts. The Beauxbatons students seemed less impressed than many of the others. Based on his dad’s description of the French school’s location, Tom didn’t blame them. Tom liked Hogwarts, but going to school in a sunny, warm climate had a lot going for it too.

The Beauxbatons students were already a bit upset with their school robes. Although they were the same color as their normal robes, these were made out of the same material as the Hogwarts robes. James, remembering Fleur’s comments about the cold during the Tri-Wizard Tournament, recommended to Dippet that all of the foreign students from warmer climates get new warmer robes. Tom knew they didn’t appreciate the robes now, but they would come the first good frost.

Nott sat in the seat across from Tom. Tom wasn’t sure how he ended up sitting between Mary and Laura. He’d expected his best mate to be sitting next to him. Instead, Nott was sitting between Xurana and Penelope. Tom shrugged and put it off as unimportant.

“Did you get into any trouble this summer?” Nott asked.

Tom grinned, "I managed a little mischief just this morning. I didn't get caught though."

Nott grinned back. He understood the message.

"Your parents have to be saints." Mary laughed. "You cause more trouble than the rest of our class."

"Nah," Tom denied. "Mum maybe, not Dad. He is worse than I am. The Terror Twins are going to pass me too. I think they are taking notes."

Laura slapped his arm. "Tom Evans. How dare you say something like that about those two angels? They are the sweetest kids."

"That is what makes them so effective," Tom grinned. "No one ever suspects them. Mum's looks and Dad's sneakiness is a scary combination. I hope the professors are ready when they get here. The castle might not be standing when they leave."

The others in the carriage laughed at Tom's comments.

"Wouldn't your father send them to the Welsh school?" Xurana asked.

Tom shrugged. "I don't know. I guess it depends on the war. I don't know if there are enough students to support two large schools once the war ends."

Mary turned to Tom. "I heard the Potter's adopted your family as a branch? That is unusual. Why did they do that?"

At the end of the summer, Thomas Potter announced in the Wizengamot the formal adoption of the Evans family into the Potter line. Officially, this was due to the Potter's standing as godparents to the Evans children. Everyone recognized the childless status of Thomas and Elizabeth. Most assumed it was a way of ensuring where the Potter seat in the Wizengamot and legacy would go. Privately, Thomas acknowledged that history might have changed too much. He wanted to keep the Potter name alive for his grandson and great-grandchildren. James chose to keep the Evans name for now but he did have the right to change his family's name to Potter (again)

Without blinking an eye, Tom told her the cover story. "I think 'Aunt' Elizabeth just wanted it to provide her with more claims on the little ones. She looks at them like they were her own grandchildren." Tom felt that was a very Slytherin answer. It was all absolutely true. His younger siblings really were Potters by birth and she did treat all the Evans children as if they were her grandchildren. Great-grandchildren if one wanted to be specific.

"My father was shocked," Mary commented. "It is a huge honor to be adopted into an old family like the Potters."

Laura nodded, "I heard it used to be done hundreds of years ago to bring honored retainers into the clan, but not much since the 1300's."

"I think most people were shocked more because your family is not Pureblood. If the Potters wanted to adopt someone in to take the name, most would expect it to be another Pureblood," Xurana added.

Laura frowned at Xurana's comment, but asked Tom, "So, are you Tom Potter now?"

The-Boy-Who-Would-Have-Been-Voldemort laughed at the sudden image that popped into his mind. What would that Tom Riddle have thought about becoming a Potter?

"Not, yet. I think Uncle Thomas is still working on Dad. He is glad to be a part of the Potter family, but he is hesitant to give up the Evans name for some reason." Tom understood why his father did not want to be known as James Potter.

The students arrived at the Entrance Hall, ending the conversation. They made their way in and sat in the Great Hall. The Great Hall changed a great deal from what Harry Potter knew. Instead of the four House tables, there were now eight long tables. Each of the Hogwarts Houses still had their own table. Two tables were set aside for Beauxbatons, one for Gdansk and one for the other new students. Professors Merrythought and Opalinski directed the students to their appropriate tables.

Tom noticed there were now two staff tables. The familiar Hogwarts and Gdansk professors sat at both tables. A number of new faces

also sat at the table. Tom assumed they were additional staff to help with the increased number of students at the school.

Laura pulled Tom's attention back to the Sorting Ceremony about to begin. "My brother Desmond is a First Year." She sounded kind of resigned about the idea.

Tom turned to look at the girl next to him. "I didn't know you had a brother."

Laura grimaced a bit. "We don't get along. He told me when he is in charge of the family, he is going to throw me out. His hero is Salazar Slytherin. He thinks he is the next Dark Lord."

"Don't worry, Laura," Nott smirked from the other side of the table, "I am sure Tom will be glad to smack him down for you." Tom simply looked at his mate and raised an eyebrow. Nott gave Laura a mockingly consoling pat on her hand. "Just get your brother spouting off on 'blood purity'. Tom will do the rest."

Tom gave his friend a flat stare and emotionlessly said, "You know, Mr. Nott, my father taught me all kinds of interesting curses to use in dueling. I think the rest of the House could use a demonstration."

Nott ignored Tom and smirked at Laura, "See how easy that is? Now you just need to point Tom at your brother and watch the fireworks."

"I was thinking about another target myself," Tom attempted to say in an ominous voice. His attempt was thwarted by the laughter that kept escaping.

Nott's baiting of Tom was interrupted by the arrival of the First years into the Great Hall with Professor Dumbledore. The huge First year that knocked Tom over towered above his classmates.

"Bloody hell, I hope he doesn't step on one of them," Tom heard a Sixth year Slytherin comment down the table. Tom found himself nodding in agreement.

Tom watched the giant First year looking around excitedly. He missed the first couple of Sortings as 'Abbot, Samuel' became a Hufflepuff

and 'Black, Orion' became a Slytherin. Finally, Dumbledore called out, "Hagrid, Rubeus" The huge First year bounced up to the stool. Dumbledore looked a bit silly as he reached up and put the Sorting Hat on the boy's head.

Tom's jaw almost hit the table. That was Hagrid?! That was the boy his father asked him to keep an eye on? Tom remembered the conversation after dinner the previous night.

Flash back – The Evan's house

James called Tom into his study after dinner. The study was lined with a number of books on a variety of subjects, magical and Muggle. Tom always enjoyed this room. After mum's potions lab, it was his favorite room in the house.

"Are you packed for your school year?"

Tom nodded, "Mostly. Everything I need is packed. If I forget something I can come by on the next Hogsmeade weekend."

"Tom, when you get to school this year I want you to do me a special favor. A First year will be arriving at the school this year. His name is Hagrid." James smiled at some memory. "Hagrid was my first friend. He brought me back into the magical world and stood by me even if no one else did. He won't be a typical First year. Try to keep people from picking on him. You know how it feels to be the different one."

"Okay, Dad," Tom agreed. "How will I know who he is?"

James laughed and a twinkle came to his eyes. "I think you will be able to figure it out."

End Flashback

Tom was wondering who would be stupid enough to make trouble with the huge First year and missed the rest of the Sorting. He did see 'Parkinson, Desmond' sorted into Slytherin. The boy glared at everyone. He had a tiny nose that made him look like a Muggle boxer.

Once the Sorting was complete, Professor Dippet stood up and addressed the Hall. "To our returning students, welcome back. To our new students and our guests from across Europe, welcome to Hogwarts. May your time here be filled with learning and fun."

Dippet explained the way of the House system to the new students. The Beauxbatons students were split into two temporary Houses, Richelieu and Lefay. Lefay was named after an ancient French wizard who was the grandfather of the Morgana Lefay and the godfather and teacher of Merlin. Gdansk would remain its own House. The other European students would collectively be called Merlin House.

Tom enjoyed the opening feast. Talking with his friends they all forgot the war and simply enjoyed the night.

The next morning Tom walked into the Potions classroom for his first class. The Third year Slytherins would be in class with the Richelieu House. Tom and Nott moved to their accustomed places and started to setup their equipment. They would have Professor Slughorn for class this year.

The Richelieu students breezed into the room and moved to the open seats. Tom ignored their presence in his concentration on setting up his equipment until he noticed the total silence that settled on the room. He looked up to find all of the boys staring at a French girl. The Slytherin girls were glaring at the same girl with hatred in their eyes.

Tom looked over at the girl and felt a pull at his mind. His summer exercises with his father sprang into effect and his basic Occulemency shields dropped into place. The shields were not strong enough to stop any direct assault, but they did deflect passive mind magic. Looking at the silver-blond haired girl again, Tom realized she was a Veela. James had told him a bit about the Veela.

Tom looked around and realized he was the only Hogwarts boy not staring. Tom noticed the girl looked decidedly uncomfortable. Tom snorted. This was too funny. He nudged Nott, "Hey, mate. Stop staring. I know she got hit with the ugly stick a lot but knock it off." Tom pitched his voice so he wasn't loud but it carried throughout the silent classroom.

The comment caused several amazed reactions. The Veela turned to look at Tom with surprise on her face. Tom gave her a cheeky grin in return, a grin she slowly returned to him. She mouthed a thank you to him. The Richelieu students looked at Tom in shock. No one had EVER insulted the blond goddess. And to call her ugly?!

The Hogwarts students shook off the effect. The boys would continue shooting glances at the girl through the rest of the class, but the majority of the magic's effect seemed to be broken for now.

Professor Slughorn stomped into the room ending the little scene. The Richelieu students found their places as the professor moved to the front of the room. As Tom expected, Sluggy spent most of the class feeling out the new students for their political or social connections. Tom learned the Richelieu students were almost entirely the children of Ministry employees. Tom learned the Veela's name was Andrea and a smug looking boy's father was the French Minister of Magic.

After class, the French Minister's son, Alajos Sardonnnes, walked up to Tom and Nott. "You dare to insult my cousin!" he sneered at them. "My father shall hear of this! We will not stand for you ill-mannered behavior! I..."

Nott stepped into the boy's face. His body language radiated the perfect classical Slytherin. In a cold voice he said, "Knock it off you git. We know you are stupid. You don't have to confirm it for us." Tom chocked back a laugh. The fool looked like he was ready to explode.

The French boy was turning an interesting shade of purple. "How dare you!" he exploded. "My father shall hear of this! He will tell your Ministry and have you expelled!"

Nott gave the boy an icy grin as picked up his bag. "When your father talks to the British Minister, tell him I said to say 'Hi.'" Then he led Tom out of the potions room. The French boy sputtered in his rage. Tom made a rude gesture as they walked out.

The two Third years held it until they reached the Slytherin common room. Then they dropped to the ground laughing.

"I hope he does run to his father!" Nott choked out.

The other returning Slytherin Third years came in and stepped around the laughing boys.

Xurana looked at them in disapproval. "That was stupid. The Sardonnnes family is very powerful. You should have made him your friend."

Tom sat up against the wall. "Relax, Xurana. It is not a big deal."

"And when he complains to his Head of House? Or his father?"

Nott rolled his eyes. "His father is dealing with the fact he just got chased out of his own country. He is not going to be petty enough to go worrying about the fact his son tried to bully the wrong people."

Tom and Nott stood in front of Headmaster Dippet's desk. Professors Dumbledore and Slughorn sat in nearby chairs. Professor DeSalle, the Beaxbatons History of Magic professor and Head of Richelieu House, stood glaring at the two boys.

"Mr. Nott and Mr. Evans, what do you think you were doing?" the Headmaster asked.

"Er, keeping up international relations?" Nott asked.

Tom held in a snort as the DeSalle blew-up. "You insulted two members of one of the highest families of France!"

"Actually sir, I only insulted one, really," Tom disagreed. "My comment to Ms. Sardonnnes was intended to stop the other boys from staring at her. I believe she understood that."

"You expect us to believe that you thought insulting her was helping?!"

Tom turned his head to glare at the professor. "It was irony, *sir*. Calling a veela ugly is pretty obviously not true." Tom could feel the anger behind his eyes. He turned his face away and started his Occulemency exercises. He really wanted to curse this fool.

The Richelieu Head of House turned to Dippet. "I must insist these students be punished. Their insult to the Sadonnes family is an insult to our minister. Mr. Sardonnes has already owed his father to protest with the British Minister." Nott snorted at that comment. The professor looked ready to blow a blood vessel.

Professor Dumbledore looked at Nott with a small smile on his lips. "Mr. Nott, did you have anything to do with that?"

Nott shrugged, "He threatened to do it, sir. I just said for him to pass along the message I said 'hi'."

The headmaster rubbed his eyes. "Ensuring, Mr. Nott, that he would in fact contact his father." Professor Dippet sighed, "It is only the first day of classes."

"Sir, Sardonnes's comments had nothing to do with defending his cousin. He wanted to prove to everyone he is the boss. I won't put up with bullies," Tom said in a stiff voice. DeSalle frowned at this but did not comment much to Tom's surprise. Tom turned to the new professor. "Professor, Sardonnes made a lot of noise about who is father is and his family. Does he know how our families are?"

"What could that have anything to do with the situation?" the professor asked in a doubtful voice.

Nott rolled his eyes. "My last name didn't ring any bells?" he asked in a sneering tone.

In an absent voice, Dumbledore commented, "Mr. Evans is the son of James Evans of the Phoenix Foundation. Mr. Nott's father is the *British* Minister of Magic"

The French professor looked at the boys in shock. Then he snorted. Then he did something Tom and Nott never would have expected. He threw his head back and laughed. He laughed so hard he had tears in his eyes. It was hard to say who looked more surprised, the boys or Professor Dippet. Dumbledore simply smiled.

"He, he set himself up, didn't he? He forgot we are not still in France and tried to throw his weight around." DeSalle was still trying to

regain control of himself. He turned to Dippet, "I think we can let the boys go now."

Dippet looked confused. "Why the sudden change?"

The French wizard shrugged helplessly. "He is a spoiled brat. His mother filled him with his own importance. Now that he has an 'equal', he will have to live with it. I must say I am looking forward to the show."

Dippet said to the boys, "You may leave now. Please try to be patient with Mr. Sardonnnes. I am sure he is just have a period of adjustment."

"Yes, professor," the boys chorused. Then they left quickly.

Half way to the Slytherin dorms, Tom whispered, "I think we have found our first target."

"Let the games begin." Nott whispered back with a grin.

7 September 1940

Tom and his friends lay on blankets near the lake with a number of books spread out in front of them. The beautiful Saturday morning tempted the Slytherins out of their dungeon. The group had grown from the previous years. Rosier continued to join Tom, Nott and the Third year girls. A number of Second and First year Slytherins were also on blankets of their own nearby.

Tom lay on his back with an open book tented over his face. His homework completed, Tom was determined to enjoy the sunny day. The Scottish Highlands did not get enough of them to waste.

He felt a hand nudge him. "Tom, wake up. I think someone is here for you." Mary said in a strictly neutral voice.

Tom peeked out from under his book. "I wasn't sleeping. Who is here?"

"So we should ignore those snores we heard?" Laura asked with a snort.

Tom ignored the comment and looked to see who was coming. He recognized the veela girl from his potions class, Andrea Sardennes.

She spotted Tom as he peeked out from under the book. She immediately started to walk over. Before Tom could stand up, the French girl settled gracefully onto the grass beside him.

“I wanted to thank you for what you did in our class. I know you did not mean it as an insult.” Tom noted her accent was very light and pleasant, only a softening of the words.

Tom sat up. A corner of his mind noted his female friends were determinedly ignoring him, while Nott and Rosier looked like their brains had left on holiday. He smiled at Andrea, “It was my pleasure. Some people have no self control.”

Andrea smiled. Then she cocked her head curiously, “But you do? Why doesn’t the veela power affect you?”

Tom shrugged and gave her a big, dumb grin. “I’m a bit dense. It takes a lot to get through to me.”

Andrea smiled. Tom heard Mary mutter, “You can say that again.”

Tom rolled his eyes and said, “I’m a bit dense. It takes a lot to get through to me.” Now he saw Laura’s shoulders shake as she laughed silently. Mary looked up and made a face at him.

Andrea noticed the by-play and smiled in a hesitant way. “I just wanted to thank you. I am used to people judging me on how I look, not who I am.”

Tom gave her a crooked smile. “I can understand how you feel.”

“Sure you can, snake-boy.” Nott commented from a few feet away.

Tom threw a handful of grass at his friend. “Keep it up and I’ll ask the girls to untie you.” Nott groaned at the pun.

“Snake-boy?”

Tom turned back to the veela. "My familiar is a snake and I am in Slytherin. So my humor-challenged friend calls me snake-boy."

"You have a snake as a familiar? Aren't they Dark?" the French veela asked.

Tom put aside his angry retort at Andrea's question. He realized from her tone that it was simple curiosity. Instead, he shrugged, "No Darker than a veela's ability to attract the lust of every man in sight."

Andrea blushed at the reminder. "I am sorry. I did not mean to offend you. My I see your snake?" Nott snorted at the unintended entendre.

"Sure, he is lying right behind Nott."

The young wizard in question threw himself up and away from the blankets. He was six feet away before he realized he had been tricked. "Damn you, Tom. You've used your minion so many times on me! That was mean making me think Nagini was behind me!" His rant was stopped as he felt the flicker of a tongue against his leg. Nott glanced down to see the cobra behind him with his hood spread. Nott promptly fainted.

Tom howled in laughter as the snake slithered over the unconscious wizard. Nagini made his way across the blanket and to her master. Andrea looked concerned but held her ground. Several of the Slytherin girls joined Tom in his laughter and pet the snake as he passed.

Tom carefully picked up Nagini and placed him over his shoulders. Then he turned to Andrea and introduced Nagini. The ice was broken as the Slytherin girls included Andrea in their laughter at Tom and Nott's antics.

"You'll have to excuse my friend over there. He seems to have a habit of fainting."

Mary laughed, "Only when you are around, Tom"

12 September 1940

Tom and Nott were making their way back up to the castle after Quidditch practice. The season would prove to be very interesting. Eight Houses were now preparing to compete for the Quidditch Cup. With most of the Gryffindor and Slytherin starters having left school, none of the Houses were fielding a veteran team. The field was wide open.

The boys were excitingly talking about the season. Nott had just become a Chaser for the Slytherin squad. He was almost bouncing as they made their way back to the castle.

Not far outside the school entrance, they heard a deep voice yell, "Leave me alone!" from just ahead. Tom and Nott stopped their conversation and moved cautiously towards the sound.

A small group of boys stood in one corner of the courtyard. The first one Tom recognized was the giant First year, Hagrid. The young Gryffindor already acquired a reputation for being painfully earnest and open. Tom heard several of the older Slytherins talking about giving the tall boy a hard time.

Hagrid was backed into the corner. A group of boys surrounded him. It reminded Tom of a picture of an elephant surrounded by a pack of hyenas. Then Tom recognized the lead hyena, Alajos Sardannes.

'Even if I didn't promise Dad to look out for Hagrid, I would help him against a prat like Sardannes,' Tom thought.

Tom met Nott's eyes and indicated the castle. Nott nodded and moved quickly and quietly towards the building. Tom drifted over toward the group of boys. He paused next to a pillar and leaned against it.

A sudden noise caused the rearmost Richelieu boys to glance behind them. Seeing the Slytherin standing there, they made their leader aware of the witness.

"Get out of here, Evans. This is not for the likes of you!" the lead bully growled.

"I was just observing your skill," Tom said in a bored voice. When Sardonnnes started to puff himself up, Tom added, "It looked bloody amateurish."

The French boy flushed with a sudden anger. "How dare you speak to me like that, you hedge-wizard?!"

Still leaning against the pillar, Tom rolled his eyes in a bored fashion. "You have no style." Tom sighed, "I guess it is the fact you are used to having your papa's name do all the work for you."

The French boy went for his wand. At an honestly impressive speed for a Third year wizard, Sardonnnes fired a Jelly-Legs Curse. As impressive as it was for a Third year, Tom had spent a good part of the summer training with the best dueler in the British Isles. Tom moved slightly to allow the curse to hit the stone pillar he leaned against. In an instant, he was back in his original position.

Tom gave his opponent a slightly mocking smile. "That was well done, excellent speed and right for the center of my chest. I'll give you an 'E'."

Sardonnnes fired two spells in rapid succession. The spells were cast in French so Tom missed the words. Oddly enough the translations spells only translated casual conversations. So, if a student concentrated on speaking a separate language, like French, Polish, or Parcelmouth, then that is what was heard. English wizards tended to use Latin-based words for their spells. Non-English wizards did not hear the spells translated to what they would use either.

Judging from the spell's colors as they passed, Tom identified them as a Tickling Curse and a Body-Binding Hex. "A Tickling Curse? I'm already laughing at you. What more do you need?"

A weak Stunner came next. Tom used his robe like a matador, pulling it away at the last second. "Olè!" he called out. A couple of the Richelieu boys suppressed laughing at Tom's grin and apparent enjoyment.

Two more Stunners followed. Both missed Tom, but not by a whole lot. He was getting tired. Making dodging the spells look effortless

was much more draining than it would otherwise be. One spell left a burn mark on his robes as he jumped over it. Tom felt a tingling just below his groin as he realized where *that* one had been aimed. Tom started to feel a little angry.

Sardennes screamed as his followers to help him. Most looked unsure but two of them did pull their wands out. Tom braced himself to take a beating.

“STOP! Put your wands down!” Professor Dumbledore swept into the courtyard followed by Nott and Ella. The pretty Gdansk student looked ready to rip someone’s head off. Tom was glad she was glaring at Sardennes instead of him.

Tom could feel the power radiating from the Transfiguration professor. It was so strong it felt like a physical force. Dumbledore stepped between Tom and the Richelieu students. “What is the meaning of this, Mr. Sardennes? Why are you attacking a student who doesn’t even have his wand drawn?” Sardennes’s helpers quickly put their wands away.

“He insulted me!” Sardennes sneered. “This dog needs to be taught a lesson!”

‘Wow,’ Tom thought, ‘this guy is too stupid to be allowed to breed. I bet that Dark Army headmaster of his allowed him free reign of Beauxbatons.’

“20 points from Richelieu, Mr. Sardennes.” When the boy started to protest, the professor added, “And a weeks detention with Mr. Oog. Would you care to try for two weeks?”

Sardennes looked like he would very much like to protest, but stopped when one of his henchmen whispered into his ear. He glared at Tom before he turned and strode into the school.

“Mr. Evans, must you taunt him?” Dumbledore asked.

“It wasn’t his fault, sir. He was defending me.” The large First year stepped out of the corner.

Tom scowled up at the younger boy. "Why did you let them bully you?"

The boy shrugged sheepishly. "Didn't wantta hurt 'em," he mumbled.

"You came to Mr. Hagrid's assistance, Mr. Evans?" Dumbledore asked. At Tom's nod, the professor said with a smile, "10 points to Slytherin." Then he left the courtyard.

"Thank you for helping me. Most people wouldn't help me." Hagrid said.

Tom waved it off. "Sardonnies is a bully. I would have helped anyone against him." Tom grinned up at the boy, "We'll just say you owe me one." Tom didn't see the need to get into all of the reasons he intervened. He figured he was a Slytherin after all.

Hagrid looked a bit confused. "Well, I thank you." Then he almost ran out of the courtyard.

Once he was gone, Tom slumped against a nearby wall. "What took you so bloody long? Another minute and I was done." Nott snorted as Ella hurried over to help Tom stand.

"You were fine. You needed the exercise anyway. Why didn't you pull your wand and curse them back?"

Tom answered between taking deep breaths. "Didn't know who you would find. If you came back I didn't want to give them a reason to punish me too."

"Plus not using magic made the git look like an even bigger fool." Nott mocked him back.

Tom grinned up. "The look on his face was priceless. Too bad he's not in our Defense class."

"Let's get you back to the dungeon. I'm sure we can find the girls and you can regale them with your tale of acting like a Gryffindor. Maybe they will fawn over the conquering hero." The trio started walking towards the Slytherin common rooms.

“Lean over here, Nott, so I can smack you like you deserve.”

“Oh, threats of violence from the great champion. I may faint,” Nott mocked.

“Tom may not smack you, Nott, but I will,” Ella promised.

“Your starting to develop a little army of devoted followers, Tom. They are a scary bunch. Always threatening violence on innocent bystanders like me.” At Tom’s glance, Nott added, “Mary, Laura, Alicia, Xurana, Penelope, Tabitha, plus most of the First and Second year girls. Ella is part of it. I think the French veela girl wants to join too.” He pretended to think, “Hmm, I think I am seeing a pattern here.”

“What does that say about you?” Tom asked.

“I’m here to keep you sane. A breath of common sense.”

“Court jester is more like it,” Tom retorted. “There are worse things to happen then to have good circle of friends.”

“Tom, we are talking about Slytherins here. Your core circle are your friends, but a lot of them are looking to use you for their own ambitions.” Nott shrugged, “You are a natural leader. You’ve pulled a lot of the younger years into a group. Even the older students have recognized the influence of the group.”

The conversation made Tom uncomfortable. It sounded too much like Dad described Voldemort’s rise to power and the initial formation of the Death Eaters. ‘At least I can stay away from the stupid names and acronyms.’

They were reaching the dungeons and Tom changed the subject. “I think we need to discuss something much more important.” The other two looked at Tom curiously. “I think the Revolution has found its first volunteer. We must plan.” Although Ella looked confused by the reference, Nott smiled widely.

The three students failed to notice the figure following behind them.

Several hours later, Tom crept out of the Slytherin common room and made his way to the Owlery. He attached a charmed note to a school owl. Only someone with a certain password could read the note. Then he returned to his dorm.

Dear Dad,

I helped Hagrid today. The Beauxbaton version of a Malfoy was harassing him. I stopped them until Nott could get Dumbledore. Our Malfoy want-to-be is Alajos Sardannes, the son of the French MoM. Aren't the Malfoys originally from France?

I heard a rumor that Sardannes is going to get pranked. Only a rumor but I'll be sure to send you a picture!

Tom

A/N: I know some will complain that this chapter is too 'fluffy'. I think it is no fluffier than most of the first three HP books. They are only 12 and 13 year-olds. I wanted to give Tom his own Malfoy. Sardannes will be more competent than Draco generally appeared.

I know some people will also have a problem with the twins speaking parseltongue. Since all of the Gaunt family we ever met in canon speaks it, it is not unreasonable to have James pass the trait on to his children. It is not important to this story. (Although it maybe to the sequel I am thinking about!)

I will be revising the first several chapters to remove various grammatical issues. I won't be changing the story, just fixing my mistakes.

Thank you to all of the reviewers! You guys keep me writing.

Rick

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Chapter 21 – La Revolution!

15 September 1940

The Great Hall of Hogwarts was awash in confusion for the third morning in a row. Students had arrived for breakfast covered in the colors of another House. The first morning it was Richelieu dressed in the Hufflepuff colors. No one really believed that a Hufflepuff would play a prank. The next morning Hufflepuff arrived in the Gdansk colors. Now the Gdansk students arrived in the Gryffindor colors.

The students of Hogwarts were abuzz in speculation on who was behind the pranks. With so many students new to one another, no one really knew who the known pranksters were from the other schools.

Professor Dippet and the Head of Houses seemed frustrated by the prank. Although Hogwarts had a long tradition among its alumni for practical jokers, the headmaster felt the pranks occurred when Hogwarts should be presenting its best face. As the last free major magical school in Western Europe, the headmaster wanted to be a shining example to the rest of the world. The professors questioned many of the students in an effort to stop the pranks.

While the professors pursued who was turning students different colors, Alajos Sardannes had the worst week of his life. A series of 'accidents' occurred to create a number of embarrassing incidents.

On Monday morning he and his dorm mates were stuck in their room until lunch. It seemed the door swelled over the night until it was too big for its frame. Unable to open the door, the boys resorted to yelling and pounding on the door. Unfortunately, the rest of the House did not hear them due to a Silencing Spell. The spell wore off before lunch but no one was around to hear them. It appeared the door swelled due to water absorption, not magic.

Tuesday at lunch the Richelieu student ate something that did not agree with him. Running from the Great Hall, he fled to the first boys' bathroom he could find. After ten long (and very smelly) minutes, Sardannes felt safe enough to leave the bathroom. However as he was preparing to leave, the girls Magical Sewing Club walked into the

bathroom. A large amount of squeals, yelling, and hollering followed. Professor Flitwick arrived to investigate the noise. Sardonnnes received two nights detention for being in the girls' bathroom. He protested it was a boys' bathroom when he ran in to it.

Wednesday resulted in several more detentions for missing homework. In all three of his classes for the day, he was unable to find his homework. It seemed all he had was blank scrolls of parchment.

After finding his third scroll blank, he protested to Professor Slughorn, "I looked at my scroll at lunch! I had it done!"

Professor Slughorn gave the boy a smile, "Very well, Mr. Sardonnnes. You may be the victim of a prank. A simple spell will reverse any magical means of hiding your work." He pulled out his wand and said, "*Revealo!*"

Nothing happened.

Slughorn gave the French Minister's son an ingrating smile. "Maybe you accidentally left your work in your room?"

"No, you idiot! I know I brought it! I checked it at lunch!"

Horace Slughorn sought to make himself appear great by assembling a web of famous or influential people as his 'friends'. It worked for him when he was in school. Now he was seeking to do the same as a rather new professor. However, he was unwilling; no matter how much he resembled one, to be anyone's toady. He wanted to be seen as the equal of his 'friends', not as a follower. Having a thirteen year-old boy call him an idiot was too far over the line for Horace, even if the boy's father was an influential politician.

"Mr. Sardonnnes, 30 points from Richelieu and three night's detention. I believe Mr. Pringle, our caretaker, could use help cleaning the Trophy Room by hand. It makes things so much shiner to see it done by hand."

Sardonnnes could only sputter in impotent rage as the Potions Master turned back to resume teaching the class. The fact his humiliation

was witnessed not only by his own House, but by the Slytherins made it worse. He found Nott and Evans grinning at him as the professor walked away.

Nott and Evans. It suddenly occurred to the boy who was behind his misfortunes. He felt his face burning in his anger. He couldn't prove it, but it had to be those two

Thursday the Richelieu Third years were leaving Arthimacy with the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs. A table stacked with pies stood in the hall across from the classroom door. As Sardennes and the Third year boys walked out of the room, the pies flew off the table. Although they attempted to duck, the pies turned to track the dodging boys. Although many of the students had been hit by pie debris, the Richelieu Third year boys were covered head to toe.

Sardennes looked up to see Evans and Nott walking down the hallway toward the scene of the pie massacre. Before he could blink, his wand was in his hand and words were forming on his lips.

Before a spell could be released, the French wizard's wand flew out of his hand and into the outstretched hand of Professor Dumbledore. "Mr. Sardennes, you will not attack your fellow students!"

"They did this! They are behind all of the pranks! I know they are!" The French wizard started to scream at the other two students.

"Misters Evans and Nott have been with me for the last hour. I am afraid your suspicions are incorrect," the Transfiguration professor said.

Then Nott leaned over and whispered something in Evan's ear. Sardennes snapped and charged at Tom. Tom sidestepped the charge and tripped him with his foot, sending the boy sprawling on the ground.

The Arthimacy professor, Professor McMillan, cast a Body-Bind Charm on the boy. The witch levitated the boy saying, "We will go talk to your Head of House about your atrocious behavior here today, Mr. Sardennes.

Floating past Tom and Nott, Sardonnnes yelled, "You shall rue the day you crossed me!"

Professor Dumbledore noticed Tom hand Nott a Knut. "And what was that for Mr. Evans?" Tom noticed the old wizard's eyes were twinkling.

"Nott bet me a Knut he could get Sardonnnes to threaten us with a 'rue-ing'. I didn't think even he could be that melodramatic and cheesy." Tom shrugged, "I lost."

"I see," the professor answered.

The professor turned and with a mumbled word and a swish, the pie remains and table had been banished. No sign of the "Great Pie Massacre" remained. Then the professor started to make his way down the hall. He paused and turned back to look at the two Slytherins.

"So many pranks lately. Some on whole Houses, others directed at Mr. Sardonnnes. The professors are concentrating on the larger pranks and ignoring the personal ones. I doubt they even realize they are occurring. I imagine that is what our pranksters intended. As long as they do not cross the line, I believe they will remain undiscovered. Oh well. My old friend Thomas would have found this fascinating." Then the old wizard turned and walked away.

The two Third year Slytherins watched him walk away.

"He knows," Nott said.

Tom laughed, "Yep, but as long as no one gets hurt he isn't going to tell.

Nott looked unconvinced, "Are you sure? He sounded a bit barmy."

"I'm sure. Let's go check on our partner-in-crime."

Tom and Nott climbed the Astronomy Tower to near the top. Just off the stairs lay one of the few remaining unused classrooms at Hogwarts. The only reason the room was unused was the distance from all of the other classrooms. The only time students climbed this

far in the tower was a night for Astronomy classes. (Unless they were sneaking off for a snog.) The classroom became a storage area for desks, chairs and tables as the Hogwarts population decreased. Now it was almost completely empty.

Five minutes after they arrived, a small pop sounded in the room. A house-elf in a clean neat dish towel looked at the two boys with a smile and big, innocent eyes. "Did I do good, masters?"

Tom laughed, "Tweaky, you did amazing! It worked perfectly!"

"Sardonnies never knew what hit him!" Nott laughed. "Talking to Dumbledore gave up a perfect alibi!"

Now the house-elf looked a little crestfallen, "The other house-elves are upset that Professor Dumblydore cleaned up the mess. They is mad at Tweaky they didn't get to clean it up!"

Tom knelt in front of the elf. "Don't worry, Tweaky. Tell them we will do something to make a bigger mess for them to clean up."

The elf smiled widely, "Thank you! With all of the new elves there is not enough for all of us to keep busy!"

When many of the European magic schools closed and families fled the continent, the house-elves fled with them. Most families with elves lived in small, temporary housing or found Muggle residences. Without the large houses, there was no need for lots of elves. The school elves and extra house elves were all sent to Hogwarts. So many elves descended on the school that there were almost as many elves as students.

One night in last year, Tom snuck down to the kitchen. A mob of elves swarmed him in an effort to answer his every need. Surprised by the swarm of elves, Tom asked about the situation. The poor elves started crying about how little work there was to do. They even had to clean in shifts to allow every elf their fair chance to clean and cook!

Holding in his laughter, Tom offered to help by making more work for them. The elves looked like Christmas came early. Tweaky, who all of

the other elves thought was a bit off, offered to help Tom make messes. Tom laughed out loud now. Tweaky was an anti-house elf!

Tom, Nott and Tweaky started playing their pranks using only magical knowledge that a normal Third year would have. While Tweaky did help with spiking drinks with potions, Tom and Nott did most of their own pranks. Tom felt it was cheating to do it any other way.

"I want to do one big prank and then stop for a couple weeks."

Nott looked surprised. "Why, Tom?"

"Dippet is going spare trying to figure out who we are. Today threw off suspicion but he will catch us eventually. Getting caught is not Slytherin. Only a Gryffindor allows themselves to get caught."

Nott nodded his agreement. "What did you have in mind?"

"Something my father mentioned. I found a potion that will do it."

Nott snorted, "Has Sluggy realized you are half way through the Sixth year NEWT material?"

Tom acted offended. "What kind of a Slytherin do you take me for?"

Raising his hands in mock surrender, Nott asked, "So what does this potion do?"

Tom grinned.

30 September 1940

Two weeks later, the Hogwarts students wandered in for dinner. The Houses settled to their places. Professor Dippet stood and made his typical evening announcements. Then with a wave of his hand the food arrived and the feasting began.

The students dove into their dinners. Conversation filled the Great Hall in a low rumble of overlapping words. Halfway through dinner a sudden scream silenced all of the conversation. As one, the students turned and looked in the direction of the scream.

A young witch in Gryffindor robes stood next to her table patting herself down in a sudden panic. Then a Ravenclaw wizard stood with the same look of panic on his face.

“Ms. McGonagall, please sit down at once!” Professor Merrythought yelled.

The young witch looked at the professor and yelled, “But I’m not Minerva!”

Then the Hall erupted as all the Fourth year and older students stood up yelling. Several fainted, including both of the new Slytherin Beaters who stood up screaming, pointed at each other and then dropped to the ground.

A sudden boom filled the room. A silence filled the room. “Students, take your seats!” The students sat in the nearest available bench. Professor Dumbledore could now be seen standing with his wand drawn.

“Thank you, Professor Dumbledore,” Dippet said. Then he turned to the students. “We seem to have pranksters in our midst. Please wait quietly while the staff and I decide what to do.”

The professors huddled up for a quick conference. Then several of them started to circulate through the students. After ten minutes, an angry looking headmaster stood in front of the students again.

“I am afraid to inform you that the Fourth years and older have been given a Body-Switching Potion. We are not sure how this happened but the results are temporary. In twelve hours it should be worn off. For tonight, I must ask you to sleep in the bed of the body you currently occupy. House-elves will provide you with anything you might need from your dorm rooms. Please follow the Third years of your host body to your dorm. Thank you.”

As the students started to comply with their instructions, the sound of trumpets filled the room. Some of the Muggle-born among them recognized the music as Glenn Miller. Then a banner appeared above the staff table.

Viva La Revolution!

Houses of Hogwarts Unite!

(Keep your hands to yourselves, little witches and wizards!)

Tom happened to be standing near the door to lead the older “Slytherins” to the dungeon. Before he could turn to leave, Professor Dumbledore caught his eye. The twinkle was obvious all the way across the room. Then the professor did something that shocked Tom.

He winked.

It took all of Tom’s self-control to not react beyond a small smile. However, he left the Hall as quickly as he could without being obvious.

As promised, the prank lasted for twelve hours. By the time the Houses woke for breakfast everyone was back in their own body. Most of the older students seemed extremely embarrassed about the results of the prank, but several seemed to be eyeing their former “hosts” with a great degree of speculation.

2 November 1940

Over the next several weeks nothing was heard from La Revolution. At first, many students spent a great deal of time speculating on who it could be. Tom heard his name mentioned once or twice but never seriously. No one really expected a Third year to be able to brew a NEWT level potion.

Professor Dumbledore never said anything. Tom walked into Transfiguration expecting to be held after for a “discussion”, but nothing was ever said. The house elves had been happy with all of their work moving students’ things around during the “Night of the Body-Switchers”. (A Muggle-born named the event.)

The next prank occurred in Professor Merrythought’s office during the Richelieu and Hufflepuff Third year DADA class on the afternoon before Halloween. The prank was revealed when the professor opened the door to her office at the end of class.

The DADA professor opened the door to her office and was greeted by a most unusual sight. A wall of water stood in the door. A magical barrier held the water back but the professor could see it filled her office. Shocked by the sight, the professor could not comprehend what she was seeing as several goldfish swam by the open door. Through the water she could see a banner hanging from the ceiling. It read, "**Welcome to the Revolution!**" She just stood and stared at her flooded office in shock.

Unfortunately, ten seconds after the door was opened a bell sounded. It rang for three seconds. The professor turned and started to run but the spell holding the water back released. Professor Merrythought and the students who had gathered to see the flooded office were hurled by a wall of water back into the classroom.

When it settled, three inches of water filled the DADA classroom. Professor Merrythought sat up in drenched robes, her hair a sopping mess. In a small pool formed by her lap a panicked goldfish was trying to find deeper water. The Third years were in the same situation. None of them noticed the camera equipped house elf taking pictures.

15 November 1940

The Slytherin table was startled when a ball of fire popped over their heads. Then they recognized the Transfiguration professor's phoenix. It was rare to see the phoenix outside the professor's office. Occasionally it could be spotted flying over Hogwarts, but never in the Great Hall.

Fawkes swooped over Tom, dropping a note onto his plate. With a trill of laughter, Fawkes flew straight at the closest wall. He impacted in a flash of fire and was gone.

"Bloody hell, the bird's as barmy as Dumbledore!" Nott said in shock.

Tom nodded his agreement as he picked up the note the phoenix dropped. He read the note and suddenly felt a bit uneasy.

"What does Dumbledore want?" Mary asked.

Tom tried to act nonchalant, "He wants me to report to his office right away. He doesn't say why." Tom exchanged a glance with Nott. If they knew who was behind "La Revolution" wouldn't they call for both of them?

Tom stood to leave the Great Hall. Nott started to stand also but sank back down when Tom shook his head. "I'll catch up with you in Herbology."

In too short a time, Tom found himself standing outside Dumbledore's office door. 'Funny,' Tom thought, 'that walk usually seems longer.'

"Come in, young Tom" Dumbledore called before Tom could knock.

Squaring his shoulders, the Third year walked as confidently as possible into the professor's office. The professor sat behind his desk. Various magical instruments of unknown sorts lay atop bookshelves. Stacks of scrolls competed for space on the professor's desk. Fawkes sat on a perch behind the professor's chair.

"Ah, Mr. Evans, thank you for coming so quickly."

Tom nodded and tried to smile, "You sent for me, professor?"

A gentle smile answered him. "Yes, I needed to talk to you about the last essay you wrote."

Tom almost fainted on the spot. This was about class work! Tom wanted to collapse from the release of tension.

"Tell me, how would you manage to keep water held back?"

"I found a book about building magical dams and..." Tom stopped in shock and stared at Dumbledore. "How did you know?"

The professor smiled with a twinkle in his eye. "I have been at this school as a professor for more than seventy years, Mr. Evans. Before that I spent seven years here as a student. I have seen pranksters in all four of the Hogwarts Houses. How they perform their pranks often tells me the House they are in."

Tom slumped into his seat. He thought they weren't leaving any trace behind. "What is my punishment?" Tom didn't mention Nott. Maybe only one of them needed to lose points and get detention.

"Punishment, Mr. Evans? Why would I need to hand out punishments? I am unaware you have broken any school rules. I merely asked a hypothetical question."

Then a new voice intruded, "As long as the pranks remain harmless and help divert the students' attention from the war, Professor Dumbledore will not feel a need to determine the true identities of the pranksters."

Tom turned in shock to see his father leaning against the wall in the corner. "Dad! How long have you been here?"

James smiled, "Not long." He moved over to take an open chair. "The professor was telling me about the new pranksters of Hogwarts. I noticed the map was missing. It was not too hard to figure things out from there."

Tom shrugged. "I knew you would figure it out once the map was missing."

James grinned, "I enjoyed the body-switching prank."

With a sour look on his face, Tom said, "Not as much as some of the Seventh years did according to what I heard. I wanted to Oblivate myself from some of the stories I heard."

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow at that. "Did some of them take advantage of their 'hosts'?"

"The potions exchanged two people. So the person who ended up in your body was the same one whose body you were in." Tom looked at the two older wizards to see if they understood. Seeing their nods, Tom continued, "I was told some of the students snuck off with their opposite number for some ... experimenting."

Dumbledore looked concerned, "So both participants were willing?"

Tom nodded, "Yep." Then a grin stole over his face. "It gave new meaning to the term, 'self-love'." James laughed at the idea while Dumbledore looked a bit green. Their reactions made Tom start laughing. "On the plus side, we now have a lot of cross-House relationships now."

"I liked the flooded DADA office," James said when he stopped laughing. "I know my father and godfather would have laughed themselves silly over that one."

"That was horrible," Tom protested with an innocent face. "I missed my DADA class that day!"

Dumbledore absently rubbed the side of his nose. "Your protest would carry more weight, Mr. Evans, if I had not heard Professor Merrythought complaining about your lack of enthusiasm in her class."

James sobered a bit, "Have you been slipping in class?"

"No, it is just so boring! All we do is talk about Dark creatures. She won't even bring any in to class, a poltergeist, a ghoul, something!"

James grinned, "My Second year defense professor released a sword of pixies in our class. Then we had to collect them when he was chased out of the room."

Tom snorted, "I heard a First year Gryffindor is pushing her to bring in a dragon. Seems fixated on them."

"Ah, young Mr. Hagrid," Dumbledore sighed. "He was inconsolable when he was Sorted."

James looked surprised, "He didn't want to be in Gryffindor?"

"No," Tom said with a smirk on his face, "he was told you had to face a dragon to be Sorted. He was disappointed when he only had to wear the Hat."

James laughed so hard he almost fell out of his chair. Gasping for breath he said, "At least I know now that Hagrid hasn't changed."

After James settled down, Tom looked directly at his father. "Dad, why are you here?"

"You mean aside from the fact your mother knows you are behind the wave of pranks hitting Hogwarts?"

"She knows?"

James grinned, "I think the twins are taking notes. They are hissing in their own shorthand language."

Dumbledore sighed, "Oh, dear." His face looked concerned but the twinkle said otherwise.

James shot his old professor a smirk. "Their grandfather said something about training them early." Now Dumbledore really did look concerned.

Tom turned back to his original question. "So, why are you really here, Dad?"

"I have to go on a business trip to Salem. We are going to be looking for some additional teachers. I may not be back before the New Year."

Tom felt his heart skip a beat. "Do you think you will be gone that long?"

James shrugged, "Possibly. I heard some other schools are out looking right now also. I don't know what they are looking for but it seems that all of the qualified teachers have gone into hiding. It may take a while to fill all of the positions."

"Be careful traveling over, Dad. The Muggle papers say the crossing is dangerous right now because of all the U-boats."

James smiled slightly, "I am more worried about the trip home. It may end up being a round-about route."

Tom felt really nervous about this news. He knew his father was often involved with missions in hostile territory, but if his father came to say

something before he left, it must be something extraordinarily dangerous. Putting aside his fears, all Tom said was, "Just be careful."

James grinned, "You can count on it."

Groaning at the pun, Tom answered, "That is what I am afraid of. Don't go all Gryffindor on me. Think Slytherin."

"I'll keep that in mind." James stood up. "I have to get going. I promised your Mum I would be home for lunch." Tom stood and they embraced. "Be good."

Tom laughed as they separated, "You mean don't get caught."

James looked confused, "That's what I said."

"When you get home I may have pictures of a certain DADA classroom filled with water."

"Cool." James glanced at Dumbledore out of the corner of his eye. "Make sure you prank your Transfiguration professor also. He needs to be kept on his toes."

Dumbledore smiled vaguely and offered his candy dish, "Lemon drop?"

James backed up towards the door. "Be careful of the lemon drops."

The professor only smiled, "Good day, gentlemen."

"Bye, professor." "Take care, Albus."

Tom walked his father to the Entrance Hall. They only talked about minor family issues and stories of Tom's siblings. Reaching the doors, Tom said, "Bring me back a gift from your trip."

"We'll see," James answered. "Take care of your mother and your siblings."

"I will, Dad. Be careful."

After a brief hug, Tom watched the only father he ever knew walking out of Hogwarts. Tom knew his father was not heading to America. He was going somewhere in Europe dealing with the war. "Get home soon, Dad," Tom murmured.

17 December 1940

The rest of the term passed quickly for Tom. The school was in chaos in the weeks leading up to the Christmas break.

Since the prank on the DADA classroom, a series of copycat pranksters appeared. Minor pranks occurred everyday. His favorite was one cast on the Gryffindor portal. Every fifth boy found his shorts gradually shrinking over the day. Nothing dangerous, just a lot of uncomfortable Gryffindors walking around the school.

Nott was upset when the first copycats appeared, but Tom pointed out it was providing them with a good alibi. If Dippet couldn't figure out who was doing what prank, they would be safe.

The beginning of December saw a pair of Fifth year Richelieu boys caught coating spoons in the Great Hall with a potion. It would have given all of the students a one hour bout of the Muggle condition called Tourets. Professor Flitwick caught them when he came in to start decorating the Hall for the holidays. This confirmed for Dippet and most of the students that a group of the French students were the pranksters behind 'La Revolution'.

Tom was actually impressed with the idea of coating the spoons. Who checks those? If you cast a detection charm for potions, it was almost always directed at the food, not the tableware. Tom decided to keep that in mind for when someone tried to prank him.

Because almost half the Hogwarts student body was comprised of war refugees, a record number of students would be remaining at the school for the holidays. Tom planned to spend most of the holiday at home but the school was allowing the students to freely wander between the castle and Hogsmeade. Tom invited (with his mum's permission) a number of his friends to visit over the break.

The first day of the break saw Tom leading a group of people down to his house for a free day in the village. The group consisted of Nott, Evan Rosier, Janek Nowicki, Mary Greengrass, Laura Parkinson, Ela Zamoyska, Andrea Sardonnnes, Xurana, Tabitha Figg, and Penelope Midlands. Snuffles escorted them home while Nagini stayed warm inside Tom's coat.

A late night snowfall left a six inch layer of white stuff covering the landscape. Nott started throwing snowballs for Snuffles to fetch. Snuffles would dive into the snow to retrieve the snowball. After the first one, Snuffles shot the boy a reproachful glance. Nott threw another one and Snuffles was off again. Soon the large black dog was running widely around chasing disappearing snowballs. Tom suspected Snuffles knew *exactly* what was happening with the snowballs, but was having too much fun.

The game continued until Nott took a snowball to the side of his head. He turned expecting to see Tom. He only had a split second to see his attackers as another hit him right between the eyes. Tom saw Nott hit by the snowball 1-2 punch. He dodged as two flew through where his head had been a split second before.

Ela and Andrea stood with their wands drawn. A large pile of snowballs sat at their feet. With a flick of her wrist, Andrea sent another snowball hurling at Tom. Tom dodged but soon all seven of the girls were pelting the four boys with snowballs. Nott and Rosier attempted to retaliate but were unable to get anything going in the face of the assault. Janek simply turned his back to the girls and braced himself.

Seeing Janek's statue imitation, Tom ran to place Janek between himself and the girls. Mary and Laura taunted Tom for hiding from them and moved to get a better angle.

Unnoticed behind Janek, Tom drew his wand. Mumbling quietly, Tom made a stirring motion with his wand. The tip of his wand started to glow a brilliant blue. Before Mary and Laura could get him Tom darted out and released the pent up energy from his wand.

A bright blue bolt of spell energy leapt from Tom's wand and impacted directly between Laura and Mary. Everyone braced for

something to happen but nothing seemed to happen. Laura started to laugh while Xurana made an off-color joke about impotent spells. Then the snow started to twist and the wind picked up. A heartbeat later a vortex formed over the spot Tom's spell impacted.

The miniature snow whirlwind formed a six foot tall spinning cloud of snow. The girls looked at Tom's snow storm in shock for a moment. Then Andrea was the first to run. Mary started right after her.

With a flick of his wand, Tom sent his revenge on top of the veela. The whirlwind ran over Andrea, dropping her to the ground and coating her in snow. Then the storm turned to chase after Mary and the other girls. Now it was the boys' turn to laugh as the girls fled the storm. Ela latched onto Janek hoping Tom would not send his whirlwind after her when it would get one of the boys too. Good strategy, too bad Tom felt no qualms about burying Janek in snow also. In a short time, all seven girls and Janek lay on the ground covered in snow.

As the girls stood back up, Tom heard Andrea growl her vengeance. Tom noticed the magical part-avian girl's eyes were glowing red. A part of Tom's mind calmly thought, 'No wonder people get so scared when I get angry.'

Fortunately the rest of Tom's mind recognized it was time to run. The other boys reached the same survival instinct a moment later. (Since the glares were primarily directed at Tom, this was an understandable delay on their part.) Soon Hogsmeade was treated to the sight of seven snow covered girls chasing three boys through the village. A large black dog ran around them all barking happily. A fourth boy trailed behind them at a much slower pace due to his laughter.

Nott yelled at Tom as they ran, "That was a stupid Gryffindor thing to do!"

Tom yelled back, "No, running was the Slytherin thing to do! Staying to face them would have been the Gryffindor thing to do!"

The usually quiet Rosier added, "A 'puff would have never thought about doing it and a Ravenclaw would have been smart enough not to do it!"

Spell-thrown snow balls started falling around the running boys as they reached the Evans house. Katie and Michael were outside on their little brooms skimming over the surface of the snow. They paused to watch the show of their beloved older brother running from seven furious teenage girls. The twins reacted much like any other younger siblings would in this situation.

They applauded.

Running out of room, the boys turned to face their pursuers. Tom raised his hands above his head and tried to look meek. "We surrender. Peace"

Ela walked right up to Tom and looked down at him for her extra three inches of height. "What are you offering in return?" Before Tom could answer, Andrea, Laura, and Mary walked up to surround Tom

"Um, hot chocolate?"

Tom never got an answer to his offer. Instead a little boy's voice interrupted them. "Which one is Tommy's girlfriend?"

The stunned teenagers turned to hear Katie answer, "I can't tell. They are all acting too silly. It's just snow." The girls surrounding Tom turned varying shades of red.

Tom hissed at the twins in Parseltongue, *None of them are my girlfriend!*

Katie shrugged and answered in the same language, *Then why are they acting so silly?*

Michael smiled *Mummy said teenagers get silly cause of 'ormons'.*

Tom started to chuckle as Mary protested. "What are you three saying?"

Laura added, "No using a language no one else knows!"

Andrea asked, "Are parselmouths that common in England? Does all of Tom's family have that gift?"

“No,” a new voice commented, “only the children have that particular gift.” Sarah Evans stood in the doorway with a large grin on her face as she took in the scene in front of her. Tia was riding on her mother’s hip.

“What about Daddy?” Katie protested.

Sarah bent down to look her oldest daughter in the face. “Your daddy is the biggest child in the magical world, just in front of grandpa and Uncle Albus!”

Katie giggled at her Mummy calling Daddy a little kid.

Christmas did not seem the same without James Evans home. The youngest twins were too young to understand anything but eating and sleeping. Katie and Michael had a harder time of understanding why Daddy wasn’t with them on Christmas morning. Tom tried his best to divert the twins’ attention, but he knew it just wasn’t the same.

31 December 1940

It was the day before Tom’s fourteenth birthday. Sarah left the younger kids with the Potters for the afternoon. She decided to take Tom to Diagon Alley for new robes. Tom also wanted to get a set of authentic Puddlemere United team Quidditch robes. The Potters had also given him some galleons for some new potions equipment. (Tom also found a book called “Pranking with Potions”!)

Tom enjoyed the afternoon with his Mum. He knew it was not the kind of thing a typical almost 14 year-old enjoyed, but spending his first six years with no parents gave him a greater appreciation of them than most of his peers. The Alley was rather quiet late in the afternoon as most of the magical adults prepared to celebrate the New Year.

They were approaching the Diagon Alley entrance to the Ministry of Magic offices when several men in black robes with their hoods up rushed towards the entrance. The men could not see Tom and Sarah until they almost reached the Ministry entrance.

Tom froze for a moment when he recognized the robes, Dark Army. The Dark wizards noticed Tom and Sarah just as Tom pushed his Mum back and shouted, "DARK WIZARDS!"

Three of the Dark wizards turned and fired spells towards the pair. Red, green and purple lights lit the darkening Alley. Tom shoved his mum out of the way as the green spell approached. Sarah landed in a clump between two buildings, hitting her head on the corner of the building. Sarah knew nothing else until she woke in St. Mungos an hour later.

Tom saw his mum fall to the ground after he shoved her. He knew she was hurt but he had no time to help her. Two of the Dark wizards were coming after them while the rest went into the Ministry. Tom drew his wand and stepped ahead and to the side of where his mother lay. (He didn't stand directly in front of her out of concern that spells fired at him might hit her if he dodged them.)

Tom took the stance his father drilled into him and yelled, "*Reducto!*" at the closest Dark wizard. Tom heard his opponent say something in a language he did not understand. Tom assumed the spell was a shield. However, Tom's spell was not fired at the wizard, at least not directly. The spell struck the cobblestones three feet in front of the front wizard. The stones exploded with the spell's impact, throwing stones like shrapnel into the legs of the approaching wizard.

The wizard dropped with a scream as his legs gave out from the stone shrapnel damage. Without waiting to consider the reality of what he had just done, Tom followed it up with a Stunner. The Stunner took the wizard by surprise and he went unconscious.

The second wizard slowed as he approached his downed colleague. He glanced down momentarily but looked up too fast for Tom to take advantage of it. In accented English, the wizard said, "That was very impressive. Not many youth can keep their cool in a situation like this. I salute you, young wizard." Without looking down, the wizard summoned the other Dark wizard's wand and placed it inside his robe.

Tom knew this one would not underestimate him like the other one did. He had to play for time. For the first time, Tom regretted his

father removing the Ministry wand usage charms. "What do you want?"

"Come now, boy, I am not going to stand here and play with you. I am sorry, but I can't have you reporting us." The wizard raised his wand.

Tom dropped into a roll to his side away from his mother. He never saw the spell fired but he heard it crack against something in the distance. Coming out of the roll, Tom started firing off Stunners, Bone-breaking Cursed and Reductos as fast as he could.

The Dark wizard was forced completely onto the defensive. Tom's rapid cursing prevented him from dropping his shield to curse Tom back. However, he was willing to be a little patient.

Tom soon understood why. A fourteen year-old wizard, no matter how powerful he was destined to be, simply did not have the depth to his magical core to go toe-to-toe with an adult wizard in an endurance match. Tom could feel himself weaken with each spell.

Suddenly, the wizard stepped to the side and fired a spell at Tom. The fireball came straight at him. Tom stepped to the side to allow it to pass. He failed to notice the spell following in its wake. Tom was hurled back as the spell slammed into him. It felt like he had just been cracked across the chest with a Beater's bat.

Tom lay on the ground gasping for breath. All of the air had been knocked from his lungs by the spell's impact. A hand reached down and grabbed Tom by the front of his robes.

Tom found himself being held up and face to face with his attacker. The wizard set Tom on his feet. "You have been a great deal of trouble, boy. But you deserve to die on your feet."

Tom summoned up the breath to hiss one word. *Nagini!*

The snake had been sleeping in the pocket of Tom's robe. Being a snake he hated to cold. Tom cast warming charms on his robe pocket on the inside of the robe. Shopping was not Nagini's thing so he slept for most of the afternoon. However, Tom being thrown across the Alley was not something even Nagini could sleep through.

The snake erupted out of the robe to bite the hand holding the front of Tom's robe. The wizard screamed in shock as he reflexively released Tom. Pulling his hand away, Nagini pulled back and hissed menacingly.

The wizard stumbled back as Nagini's venom spread into his blood stream. He was looking at his hand in horror. His knees gave out and he sank to the ground. Based on what Tom knew of Nagini's venom, he would be dead in less than twenty minutes without the proper antidote potion.

Tom hissed to his familiar, *We need to get mum out of here. She is hurt.* Tom noticed an additional shock on the dying Dark wizard's face as he heard Tom hiss.

As Tom struggled to his feet, he heard a crack as the other Dark wizard Apparated away. Tom frowned. He never noticed when the wizard regained consciousness from the Stunner. He would worry about that later. First, he had to get mum out of here and then alert the Aurors about the attack.

Lifting his mother carefully, Tom started to make his way as quickly as he could towards the Leaky Cauldron.

Three days later, an injured wizard appeared in his master's chamber.

"Were you successful?"

The wizard stood painfully in place. He had not been invited to sit in spite of his wounds. "The Ministry raid failed, master. We never reached the records room. However we may have succeeded in part."

The pleasant faced Dark Lord smiled, "Explain, please"

The courteous request did not make the wizard more comfortable. His Lord would be courteous right up to the time he cursed you. "A young wizard confronted us in Diagon Alley. He killed Schultz with a poisonous snake. I heard him hiss a command to it. He must be the missing Gaunt boy. Morfin Gaunt claimed only his family had that gift."

The Dark Lord nodded, "You are correct. Your mission was not a total loss. Place your memory into the Pensieve. I want all of my operatives to know what the boy looks like. We will find that boy. I must have Slytherin's journals to complete my work."

"Yes, master." The wizard turned to limp out of the chamber.

His master stopped him. "After you are healed, report to Christina for some remedial dueling training. I can't have my people being beaten by a teenage wizard, can I?"

The wizard bowed, "Yes, master." As he left the wizard wished his master would just use a Crustatious Curse on him. It would be a lot less painful than dueling training with Christina.

In a nearby room, a German witch listened to the Dark Lord's conversation. As a member of resistance she knew this was information she needed to get out. If the Dark Lord got a hold on Slytherin's writings, it could cause him to complete his demonic research. She needed to reach the British Ministry to warn them.

A/N: Things are starting to heat up for Tom. Chapter 22: James does Berlin!

Thank you to everyone who reviewed! I deeply appreciated it. Chapter 20 set a personal record of 78 reviews (27 March 2007)

Thanks,

Rick

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Chapter 22 – Winter in Berlin

2 December 1940

James walked down the Paris street in the early morning light. Paris had been in German possession for more than six months now. The city itself did not seem much changed until one noticed half the city's population was missing. Then there were the German units standing guard over key buildings and intersections. James was dressed as a day laborer and had the papers to prove it. He walked past the German soldiers without acknowledging their presence. For their part, the young German soldiers did not seem interested in harassing a seemingly middle-aged, slightly overweight and drunk worker.

James had been traveling since he had left England two weeks before. A ten second trip by Floo, two weeks were needed to slip unobserved into occupied France. It started with an Apparition to neutral Ireland. From there he boarded a cargo ship bound for Lisbon, Portugal as a stowaway in his bat form. Flying off the ship at night once it was in port, James changed into his wolf form once out of the city. From Portugal, he traveled in wolf form through Spain and into Vichy France.

The Vichy Government sought to appease their German masters by maintaining a harder line than the Germans did themselves. Crossing the Spanish border undetected was a challenge even for a wolf. Outside Paris, James stole the papers from three different French Muggles.

Since leaving Ireland, James performed no magic except for changing forms in Lisbon and Paris. The idea was to leave no magical trace for the Dark Army to pick up his trail. The only things magical James carried was his wand (hidden in a holster on his leg with a Notice-Me Not and Anti-Summoning charms and a shrunken trunk that looked like a locket around his neck. Both were charmed to shield any magical detection. In a hidden pocket of his rucksack, James stashed his pistol of Ministry fame. It was easy to get to but not detectable to a casual search.

James's orders were to meet a French magical resistance agent at a café in Paris on a Monday morning. If James missed this Monday, he

would have to wait an entire extra week before trying again. Waiting for an extra week inside an occupied city did not sound like a good idea to James. He timed his arrival to enter the city late on Sunday night. A night in a Paris alley and now James was ready to meet his contact.

Right on schedule, James entered the café and spotted his contact. In a completely open manner, James approached him and asked in French, "Are you Albert? I understand you are looking for a worker?"

The man addressed as Albert nodded and set down his coffee cup. He appeared to be a farmer. In the same language he answered, "You seem a likely candidate. I warn you the work will be hard and tiring! You must stay sober!"

James nodded in a sheepish manner, "I can do that. I need the work."

"What is your name?"

"Alan Rickman, sir," James answered.

The farmer nodded in an abrupt manner. "Very well, I have a truck outside. I came into the city to make a milk delivery. You can wait by the truck until I finish my coffee."

James nodded, "Yes, sir." Then he quickly made his way out of the café and made his way to the truck.

Ten minutes later, the farmer walked out and indicated James to climb into the passenger side of the truck. The farmer took a drink from a flask before starting the engine. James could smell a hint of alcohol. In a short time, the truck was making its way through the early morning streets of Paris.

They passed through three German checkpoints before leaving the city. The German soldiers checked their papers and searched the truck each time. From the greetings, James got the feeling this was a regular run for the farmer. While the soldiers did not seem friendly, they greeted Albert by name and treated the farmer like a known commodity.

They spent more time on James, or 'Alan Rickman' then the farmer or his truck. Who was he? Why was he in Paris? Where was he going? The farmer vouched for hiring 'Alan' and that settled them a bit but it still took a while.

Once outside Paris, neither man spoke to the other. James noticed a man dressed as a Nazi officer watching them at the last checkpoint. Something about the way the man wore his uniform was not right. As a uniform it was perfect, but something in his body language suggested he was not used to wearing it. James wondered if he was unused to the uniform or Muggle clothes in general. That concern prompted James to stay silent. James also kept silent when Albert's Polyjuice Potion wore off.

Thirty minutes after leaving Paris, the truck pulled down a small dirt lane surrounded on both sides by pastures. The truck pulled into a small farm yard. A small house sat across from a rather large barn. Neither building looked to be in good repair. Paint and other maintenance issues had obviously been ignored since the beginning of the war.

Bringing the truck to a stop in the yard, the farmer climbed out. "Come inside, we get you squared away."

James followed the farmer into the house. Once they were inside, James could feel subtle privacy wards being raised.

The farmer embraced James and kissed him on the cheeks in French fashion. "It is good to see you again, Count. I was never able to thank you for what you did for us in June."

"It is good to see you again too, Claude. I had heard you made your way to your wife's village."

Claude Delacour gestured to a seat, "Relax, this is a safe house the DMLE used for hiding informants. It was removed from the records six months before the Germans invaded. Magically, it is sealed off. You looked much better the last time I saw you."

"Why not make it Unplottable and use a Fidelius Charm?" James asked. He ignored the comment about his middle-aged disguise.

Claude shrugged, "We needed a findable location for the German papers. Also Dark wizards have been using magical detection spells."

James looked confused, "They still shouldn't be able to find them."

"True," Claude grinned, "they are looking for holes."

Comprehension flooded James mind. "So, if they find a place registering no magic at all it is someplace to take a look at. Clever bastards."

"Yes, they are, aren't they?" Claude agreed. "I wish they would be clever bastards in their own country." Claude poured James a cup of tea and both men settled into comfortable but worn chairs. "So, my friend, I understand you would like to go to Berlin?"

James smiled slightly over the rim of his cup. "I don't know about wanting to go to Berlin. It seems I must."

Claude snorted his agreement. "Yes, I understand. My superiors have decided I am to accompany you."

"What about your cover here? Why do they want you to go?"

"Albert is actually the farmer here. He is a Muggle. His son was a Muggle-born Auror. He will continue to work the farm and do the Monday run into Paris. As for why I am going, the Ministry in exile wants to me to be your ... sidekick, I believe the term is."

James looked amused, "My sidekick? Why?"

Claude shrugged. "They wanted me to back you up. I have some contacts in the German underground." "Their underground has been in existence almost from the time Grindelwald took power," he explained. "Also, I believe the Minister believes we 'owe you one', as the Americans say."

"How have the German resistance survived?" James asked. He knew of their existence but wanted another's perspective.

“Most of the pure Light families fled when the Dark Lord took over their ministry. Darker families were very vocal in their support. As for the rest, I will call them the Grey families. The Grey families were mostly the business men, shop keeps and other professionals. They figured if they kept their heads down and their noses clean, Grindelwald would leave them alone.

Some of them realized that would not work. They joined with the few remaining Light families to undermine the Dark Lord. Mostly, they are ineffective at anything but surviving. But given the environment they live in, survival is the biggest priority. They are very good at that.”

James nodded. Claude’s assessment fairly well matched his own. “So, how do we get to Berlin?”

“The Nazis are going to drive us there.” At James’s surprised look Claude smiled, “They need construction workers in Berlin. I have arranged for us to take the place of two Muggles that were selected. The train leaves tomorrow at dawn.”

So, tell me what the plans are for Berlin?” Claude asked.

The two wizards talked and planned all day and into the night.

3 December 1940

The train ride was a lot different then Harry’s experience on the Express. Six cars worth of Frenchmen were shipped into Berlin...in a box car. The men either stood or sat on the floor. The conditions were so crowded the men had to sit in shifts. No one talked during the trip if they could help it. None of the Muggles on the train acted like they had any hope left. James idly wondered if the Dark Army had a way of creating Dementor-like effects in Muggles.

The train arrived in Berlin after a several hour trip with no food or water provided. The car loads of men were removed from the cars and herded into German army trucks. James maneuvered himself to be the last to board the truck. He wanted to be in a position to get a good view of Berlin as they drove through it.

James found Berlin to be the cleanest city he had ever been in. Not one thing was out of place. The buildings looked well-maintained. It looked like something out of a picture book. It was perfect, at least, as long as one ignored the constant police presence, the red banners and the portraits of the ultimate of evil bastards, Hitler.

As the truck progressed through Berlin, James wondered about the extent Voldemort's views and tactics were influenced by Hitler. They seemed much closer to Hitler's view than what Grindelwald sought. James found a certain sense of irony that a pureblood fanatic dark wizard would use a Muggle dictator as a role model.

The trucks pulled into a barracks like area and the men unloaded. The men stood in a clump and the trucks pulled away. A couple guards stood near the entrance but that was all. A harsh December wind blew through the men.

A large German man wearing working clothes but sporting a Nazi armband appeared in the yard from one of the buildings. He yelled in German, "Line up here to enter your barracks! Move!"

The crowd moved quickly as the man instructed. With a minimum of fuss, a line was soon formed. Once he was satisfied, the man allowed them into the barracks.

The barracks consisted of cheap metal bunks with flimsy looking foot lockers at the end of each bed. Only a sheet of plywood separated them from the cold wind outside. Several old wood stoves lined the middle of the barracks as the sole heat source.

Looking around in disgust, James thought, 'I never thought I would sleep in a place worse than that damn cupboard!'

"Gather around!" the large German called. James noticed his left leg was artificial and caused him to walk with a limp. The men gathered around him meekly.

"I am Hauptfeldwebel Mann. For my sins and a Polish bullet, I am the foreman of all the foreign workers involved in building the Fuhrer's great works. You should be proud to be included in an effort that will stand the thousand years of the Reich!" The large former soldier

stamped his wooden leg when he mentioned the Polish bullet. James assumed that was the cause of his 'retirement'.

"Quality work is required! Poor work or not meeting schedule will result in punishment. You are here because the proper German workers are needed in the army bringing the gift of the Fatherland to the rest of Europe."

James wondered if Sergeant Major Mann truly believed his spiel or if he was just trying to get along. He really could not tell.

The sergeant major continued, "If you work well, you will be permitted to leave the barracks to visit one of the many fine German beer halls. If you would like to earn extra pay, I may be able to get some of you positions working in one." Mann looked around at the mostly blank faces surrounding him. "Dinner will be served in twenty minutes. Work started at 7. Be out of bed and ready by then." Then he walked out of the room.

James settled onto the lower bunk in the middle of the room. Claude took the bunk one over from him. Before James settled down to rest before dinner, he shot Claude a glance. The two had not spoken since arriving at the train depot that morning.

The glance clearly asked, 'This was your great idea?!'

Claude gave a slight shrug in response. He mouthed, 'Oops'

James involuntarily chuckled to himself as he lay down. 'It is a good thing Ron isn't here for this,' he thought. 'He would have been miserable if the food is half as bad as I'm expecting.'

Thinking about his old friends, James realized he could think about their adventures and misadventures now without pain. Only a kind of nostalgia remained. Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Luna and Neville would always remain important memories and alive within him. He still thought about them with love, but it was only a bittersweet ache. Inside a German 'visiting' worker camp was a strange place for this kind of epiphany. With his eyes closed, Harry James Potter thought about a certain Halloween and a troll.

A couple of his fellow workers wondered about the guy lying in his bunk with the slight grin on his face.

25 December 1940

The food was just as bad as James feared.

The French workers spent the next three weeks laboring on the new Nazi buildings. James and Claude worked carrying material to the German craftsman doing the actual building. The craftsmen were neither friendly nor hostile to the French workers. James got the sense they did not want to be involved. He would readily admit they did excellent work though.

Walking past the various Nazi offices, James realized for the first time what the wizards of his timeline truly felt on seeing the Dark Mark. Passing the Nazi banners and other symbols caused a chill to run down his spine. Although Harry only spent until his 11th birthday living amongst Muggles, the hatred of those symbols was ingrained. He still thought the wizards were idiots for the 'You-Know-Who' thing.

The arrival of Christmas did not stop the work. Rather the German decided today would be an excellent opportunity to move a large quantity of materials through the mostly deserted buildings. After a promised Christmas feast (it would include an extra slice of bread) the French workers would be allowed their first foray into the German beer halls.

Claude signed up to work in one of the beer halls. He expected his contact to approach him there. James knew the beer halls would be filled with intelligence agents, counter-intelligence, Gestapo, Dark Army, German resistance and the PTA. James wondered if anyone would be there simply to drink.

James, or Alan Rickman, established a rapport with the German Sergeant Major early on. James's story was his father was a German caught on the French side of the border after the last war. The fictional father moved to Paris looking for work where he married a French girl. James's perfect German lent an air of believability to the story.

James didn't set out to win the tough German ex-soldier. The sergeant major had been screaming at a pair of French workers who understood very little German. Catching James's amused snort over a reference to their fathers' having carnal relations with a goat, the sergeant insisted James translate for him. James complied and even translated the swearing into the appropriate French terms. Mann was impressed with James's translation and delivery. (James later learned the sergeant spoke excellent French.)

When the rest of the workers left to wander around Berlin, James decided to stay in the barracks. All day he could feel sadness coming through his scar. Tom seemed upset over something. James acted slightly ill so the others would not question his staying behind.

Once it dark had settled across the city, a bat fluttered out of the small bathroom window. The Count came out to play. The bat flew down the street twenty feet above the heads of the Germans below. The bat's squeak was lost in the noise of the people and cars below.

The Count had operated in Berlin twice before. Both times he was assigned to retrieve something from the German capital. The first one was a hidden cache of magical items from an old witch. That mission based without a hitch as the Count ghosted in and out of hostile territory. The second was supposed to be assisting a Light wizard escape the country. Dark Army wizards and a third party became involved in a duel. James showed up at the meeting place to find the battle going and his contact AK'd. (James later learned the wizards were a hit squad from Poland after the leader of the Dark Army unit.)

James made his way to the entrance of magical Berlin. Unlike the Leaky Cauldron, the Berlin entrance stood in the open. A large hallway turned off the main corridor in the Berlin underground. The hall had various Muggle repealing charms to prevent them from wandering down the corridor. James approved as German magical shoppers seeming to come out of the underground were much less likely to attract suspicion. James also knew it led to the Durmstrang version of the Express.

James's mission tonight was to gather information. Hopefully the Dark Army would never know the Count was ever in Berlin on this visit.

The Berlin alley was renamed after Grindelwald took power. It was now called, 'Der Platz des großen Führers'. Translated into English it meant 'Great Leader's Place'. James long since decided that all Dark Lords were megalomaniacs. He preferred the original name 'Die Ruhe des Zauberers' much more. It meant 'Wizard's Rest'.

The Alley was very quiet this late on Christmas night. Most wizards were not Christian but the day was kept for family gatherings. The shops had all closed except Gringott's Berlin branch. (The goblins were staying out of this war, thank you very much!)

James passed a small broom shop and circled around when the name caught his eye. It was the Firebolt Broom Shop. The shop sold Cleansweep and Nimbus brooms. A sign indicated that few of the British brooms were left in stock. The sign further stated the shop was working on developing its own line of brooms. James wondered if this was the genesis of his beloved racing broom.

Like Diagon Alley in London, the Berlin alley had a connection to the German Ministry of Magic. Although it was known Grindelwald no longer maintained offices there, the vast majority of the German magical bureaucracy remained housed here. Wards prevented anyone with malicious or hostile intent from entering the grounds. A spy or assassin would be blocked and activate alarms.

James fluttered right by the Dark Army guards.

During his fight against Voldemort, James learned a great deal about Oaths and wards. The wording of each was more important than a contract negotiation with a Hollywood lawyer. The wording detailed exactly what the magic would and would not allow. Snape taught him that.

The German Ministry wards talked of grand protections from hostile intent or harming the German magical people. It never said anything about playing pranks on the German bureaucracy. James was not

here with hostile intent or to hurt the German people. Instead, he left behind a gift, what Muggles of another time would call an 'Easter Egg'.

When James developed his anti-Muggle bomb wards, two versions were developed. The first operated at a much higher power and deflected bombs onto an alternate location. James only deployed this ward on the schools and the orphanage. The second ward was provided to the Ministry and other key locations, such as Diagon Alley. Both wards tied into the Anti-Muggle wards to prevent bombers from intentionally targeting the protected areas.

The second ward used much less power than the first. Rather than banishing the bombs to an alternate location, the wards defused the bombs as they passed through the wards. The wards then shrank the bombs so no damage was done to the buildings below. The loophole lay in the wards need to be 'reset'.

Bombs before the era of laser sights and GPS, relied on the bombardier's eyes and a large number of bombs. To take out a single target sometimes required dozens of aircraft and damaged the entire surrounding area. The alternate wards were designed to handle the odd bomb falling off target. After two or three bombs, the wards needed ten to fifteen seconds to 'recharge'.

As James expected, the Dark Army had stolen James's wards and emplaced them on their own buildings. However, the second ward had a small loophole. James's prank relied on that recharge rate and one minor modification to the Anti-Muggle charm. The 'Easter Egg' modified the wards to act as a Muggle-Attraction charm. The bombardiers' eyes would be attracted to the target. Without thinking about it, they would adjust their bombsights to hit the wards. The rain of explosive metal would overload the wards.

The 'Easter Egg' would only last through one attack. The German air raid sirens would activate the spells. Then it would burn itself up. If the Dark Army investigated, it would look like random chance caused too many bombs to fall here accidentally. James did not want to leave any trace. After all, he may want to use this again someday.

James thought it was a great prank. Sirius and the Weasley Twins would have loved it.

Carefully making his way back out to the magical street, James left to meet Claude. His French companion should now have started his new position as a bartender. After tonight's work, James felt like getting a glass to celebrate.

28 December 1940

The French worker known as Alan Rickman was loading records boxes onto a truck as the workday ended. A group of other workers wandered by on their way to dinner. Claude walked with them. As they passed, Claude called out in French, "Rickman, join us for dinner!"

Several of the other Frenchmen grumbled about Rickman's inclusion. He was seen as being the 'pet' of the Germans and was not very social with the other workers. Claude played the part of unofficial social director of the French workers. This enabled him to talk with James while not appearing to be friends with him.

James set down the last box to be loaded. He was very curious about the boxes' contents but the German soldiers watching over him were too alert to provide him an opportunity to answer his curiosity. James looked over to where Claude stood, "I will join you after I clean up."

Claude gave a friendly but casual shrug, "Suit yourself. I found a new drink I think you should try."

James gave a vague wave and started to make his way back to the barracks. Claude's comment about the new drink meant he found a potential contact he wanted James to meet. This was a dangerous time for any agent. One had to reveal their true allegiance first and hope they had read the signs correctly. If not, the best case was the uninvolved Muggles who merely screamed for the Gestapo. Worst case was they were Dark Army agents about to draw their wands.

James showered the day's grime off and dressed quickly. He slipped his wand into a special holster strapped to his calf. The holster was designed for Unspeakables and would pass through any kind of a casual search without notice. Even a pat down was guaranteed to miss it. Only an advanced magical scan would reveal its presence. It was not a quick-draw solution, but James hoped not to draw it.

He considered not taking the wand with him at all. If he was caught with the wand or the pistol he would go from being a suspicious person to a confirmed enemy agent in a heartbeat. If this meet did go bad, James wanted to be able to fight his way out.

James reached the beer house. Inside it was light and filled with music and loud talk. Opening the door, James was hit by an almost physical wall of sound. Shades were drawn over the windows to limit the light escaping due to blackout regulations. Slipping into the room, James made his way over to where Claude sat with a young woman on his knee. Claude was boisterously talking with a couple other workers who were trying to talk the young woman onto their laps.

As he approached, James observed the young woman. A extremely pretty girl, she would have given many of the veelas James had met a run for their money. The unknown woman however did not have that magical aura of attraction all veela maintained unconsciously. Every male eye (and some female) tended to glance over at her from time to time. She seemed perfectly content on Claude's knee. She projected the perfect front of a 'working girl'. However, James sensed something different about her.

It was her eyes. Although they seemed friendly and open, there was a hint in the corner of her eyes. They seemed flat. As he reached the group, James realized what that flatness signaled, Occlumency. Claude had a witch sitting on his knee.

Claude called to James as he approached the group. James noticed the witch turned a weighing glance on him as he walked towards the group. "Alan, come meet my new love, Maria!"

James walked up and took the witch's hand. He bent over to kiss her hand without breaking eye contact with her. Then he said, "A pleasure, miss."

If the situation was not so serious, James would have laughed as she blushed. "Claude, your new friend is a charmer. You may have some competition after all," she said in a breathy little voice.

Claude laughed at her comment while the other French workers had a mixed reaction. While they enjoyed seeing the woman verbally

smack Claude, the fact she responded to James's attention and not their own attempts angered them. James noticed this and ignored it. James signaled for a beer and settled down on the periphery of the group. After several minutes, the other workers seemed to forget James was there.

An hour later and Claude was due to start his shift tending bar. With a great show of regret, he left Maria and made his way to the bar. The other workers laughed at his antics.

Maria made a show of her own after Claude left. The gorgeous blond moved from lap to lap, never staying with one man for too long. She claimed she did not want to make Claude jealous.

Eventually, she ended up on James's lap. Many of the other workers scowled at this. She teased them back while ignoring James while perched on his lap. After only a few minutes she moved on. They had never said a single word to each other the entire time she sat on his lap.

An hour and a half into Claude's shift, James excused himself, and made his way to the loo. Once in a stall, James read the note he had been slipped. It was from Claude.

Alan,

Get to know Maria. Tell her what a wonderful guy I am. I am counting on you.

Your friend,

Claude

James knew the note came from Claude. The final sentence was a pass phrase to ensure the message's authenticity. Maria must be the contact Claude indicated.

James swore under his breath. Talking to a beautiful lady in a bar is not a bad thing. That is, unless you are an undercover operative behind enemy lines who wished to remain undercover. He was not James bloody Bond! There was a technical term for agents who

became exposed on a mission: Dead. Grindelwald was not going to play a 'gentleman's game' or be politely amused by James's mission to stop him. The Dark Lord would simply order the death of Alan Rickman. Then James would have to fight his way back to England.

James made his way back into the bar. As he sat down, Maria saw him and dropped into his lap.

"You were gone for a long time. We're you thinking about me?" she asked in an innocent little girl voice. She also turned her big blue eyes on 'Alan' in full force. James was inoculated against the 'little innocent girl look'. Ginny had been the mistress of the look. She perfected it on her six brothers and her father. Katie was a least a journeywoman. She practiced on her father, grandfather and Uncle Albus constantly. 'Maria' while very beautiful could not hold a candle against those two witches.

Playing along, James answered, "I thought of you the whole time I was gone." This had the advantage of being true, just not the way most listeners would understand.

Maria squealed and bounced on James's lap. "Oooh, I knew you would be thinking of me!" She snuggled into James's shoulder. Then she whispered into his ear. "We must meet. Follow me upstairs."

Maria bounced up and snatched James's hand. She pulled him up and dragged him along. James followed with a silly grin on his face. Catcalls from some of the other patrons followed after them.

James heard a couple muttered comments. "She dragged me up last night..." and "She picks another guy each night..."

James followed her to a nondescript door with the number 7 on it. She pulled out a key and unlocked it, all the while keeping up a flirting act with James. Once the door was open, James followed her in.

James stepped into the room and scanned the open corner to the right of the door. Then with his back to the corner, James scanned the rest of the room. The only thing James found was a charm that would cause anyone listening in to hear exactly what one would expect to hear coming from a prostitute's room. A combination of

Albus working with James on wandless magic, and Unspeakable trainers demonstrating how to detect hidden foes or listening spells, allowed James to magically scan the room very quickly. Once he was done, James turned his attention back to his host.

Maria watched James with an intent expression. "You did not use your wand." Her voice was now very focused. No trace of the ditzy party girl from the bar remained.

James ignored her implied question. "So, do you really bring a different guy up here each night?"

The beautiful mouth frowned, "Yes, they spend the night asleep on the couch and leave with a Memory Charm about nights that never happened." James simply nodded as she confirmed what he already expected.

"Why are you here in Germany?" Maria asked.

"Who do you work for?" James asked in return.

James watched as she carefully drew her wand from a hidden location under her dress. (James really didn't want to know where it was hidden.) Keeping her eyes on James she said, "I swear on my magic I am a member of the resistance. I have never served Grindelwald or the Dark Army and never will."

James nodded at her Oath. Within limits it was specific enough. "I am an Unspeakable from the British Ministry. I am here to make contact with the resistance and gather intelligence."

"You might want to work with your partner a bit more. He asked for a butterbeer. I almost hexed him on general principles."

James shrugged, "French Auror. His ministry sent him so they can say they are Doing Something. He'll learn or not. I will bet though he had his wand handy for any reaction. I sincerely doubt it was an accident."

The German witch shrugged and gestured at the open couch as she settled into a chair. James chose instead to sit on the floor against the wall.

“Don’t you trust me?”

“Of course I do. The floor simply looked more comfortable.” The witch looked amused and approving of James’s caution. (Harry’s Moody would have been so proud of him.)

The witch’s amusement ended as she asked, “What can the British wizards offer us?”

“Information, coordination, and magical supplies to start off with. Claude will be your contact.” James smirked at the witch, “Congratulations, you just got a boyfriend.” She glared back and James continued, “In return we will expect information from you. Over time if we build up trust we can coordinate operations.”

“Are you remaining here also?”

“Possibly,” James absently answered. “I will be leaving now.”

Maria objected, “You can’t leave yet. It is too soon. They will suspect something!”

“So what do you suggest?”

Maria shrugged, “Do you play chess?”

31 December 1940

James sat at a table at six in the evening when he gasped in sudden pain as his scar started to bleed for the first time since the death of Voldemort. Around him, his fellow workers looked on in confusion as to what caused the loner in the group to cry out in pain at dinner.

James was oblivious to everything around him. He could feel Tom’s anger, fear, and rage. Something was happening in England. Something horrible and he was not there to stop it. If not for the vast

network of Anti-Apparition wards erected between London and Berlin, James would have been there in a heartbeat.

Almost as suddenly as the pain started, it dropped down to a low level ache. James could feel Tom's relief and concern but he did not seem to be in any immediate danger. The rage bubbled along under the surface, but not at the hell-fire level of only moments ago.

Pulling his thoughts together, James considered what he had felt from his son. 'Voldemort never felt a rage like that. He raged about Death Eaters' failures or my survival. Tom is angry at something personal.' James realized the difference. 'Someone hurt someone Tom loves. I recognize the anger. I felt it when Cedric, Sirius and all the others were killed.'

Intellectually, James felt better about Tom's rage now. Subsiding, James realized this meant someone was hurt, not killed. Emotionally, that didn't matter much; James still wanted to get home as soon as possible. Physically, James decided, 'Merlin that still hurts like hell!'

A hand on his shoulder broke James out of his thoughts. "Alan, are you okay?" Claude asked.

James nodded delicately, "I banged my head earlier. The scab gave way."

"Let's get you fixed up. I need to go on shift at the beer house soon."

James allowed Claude to lead him away from the table. Once they were safely out of sight, Claude asked what happened. James shook him away.

"It is not important. Something has come up, I have to go back to England immediately."

Claude looked shocked, "You can't go home now! We have a mission to complete!"

"This is more important. You have your contact with Maria. Build on that. You don't need me here now."

Claude grumbled but let the matter drop.

James tried to find a good opportunity to leave over the next five days. At Claude's instance, James agreed to stay one more day to meet with Maria one last time.

Unfortunately, a British air raid occurred the next day. As James hoped, the German Ministry of Magic was leveled when several planeloads of bombs smashed through the roof. It was an early morning raid so not many shoppers were in the alley. The raid did catch many of the Ministry workers at their desks. Confident in their wards to prevent any damage, they failed to seek cover when the sirens went off.

The Dark Army erupted like a kicked bees nest. Wizards in black Gestapo style coats seemed to be everywhere looking for whoever brought down the wards. Eventually they found exactly what James wanted them to find. The wards simply became overloaded and collapsed under large number of Muggle bombs.

The bombing and the subsequent Dark Army activity prevented James from leaving Berlin. Nazi troops prevented his departure as a Muggle. Dark Army wards prevented James from using Appartition or his animagus forms from leaving. For over a week an increasingly surly wizard was forced to keep his head down and wait while his imagination conjured up a wide variety of horrible images for what awaited him in England.

6 January 1941

"Come out to the beer house tonight, Alan," Claude said as he approached James's bunk. When no response came back, Claude nudged the bunk, "You need to get out. You are so grumpy even the guards are avoiding you."

A clunk from behind Claude seconded this, "Get out of here, Rickman! You are stinking up my barracks! I want you shaved, showered and out of my damn barracks in ten minutes! MOVE IT!" The German Sergeant Major still had the voice to shout across parade grounds. James was out of the bunk and moving before he even considered resisting the sergeant.

Two hours later, a much happier seeming Alan Rickman sat at a table in the beer hall. Maria was off flirting with her 'boyfriend' Claude. James pretended to act slightly drunk for any watchers.

Maria maneuvered her way across the room and settled into James's lap. "Hello, you sweet man. Claude sent me over to cheer you up." She wrapped her arms around James's neck and rested his head against her chest. She leaned over and acted like she was nibbling on his ear. She whispered, "I have something for you."

James pretended to get into Maria's ministrations. Actually he felt dirty for allowing her to touch him like this. He knew it was needed to keep his cover, but it felt wrong.

After a couple of minutes, Maude, the beer house manager, yelled at Maria for being indecent. "You know we don't allow that in the public rooms! Stop it or leave!"

Maria gave Maude a pout. "Alan just needs some attention to raise his mood!"

One of the bar patrons yelled out, "That is not all you are raising!"

Maude looked furious. "Get out! I don't want you here for the rest of the night. Take your drunken toy with you."

The regular patrons laughed as Maria dragged the seemingly drunken Alan up to her room. They particularly enjoyed the look of anger on Claude's face as his 'girlfriend' took another man to her room. Even the believed Gestapo informant in the room seemed to enjoy the show and saw nothing suspicious. After all, Maria's activities were well-known and documented.

Once inside the room, Maria wasted no time raising her privacy charm. James settled at the small table in what served as her kitchen. Maria sat directly across from him.

"I received a owl today from one of my sisters. She works in the Dark Lord's headquarters as a researcher and curse-breaker. She overheard something. She could not be clear in her letter but her code gave me three key words: Slytherin, Heir, and Meet."

James went white at those three words. Suddenly the scar pain of a week ago took on a whole other layer of urgency. "How did your sister hear this?"

Maria turned red in a mixture of anger coupled with embarrassment. "I have another sister. She joined Grindelwald when she was still a student. My eldest sister, Serena, was a librarian with no political leanings. My other sister had her hired because she is the best researcher in Germany."

"Does your younger sister know you are still in Germany?"

Maria shook her head, "No, she thinks I left for Australia. I actually did for a time. She had my parents kick me out of the family."

James nodded. It kind of sounded like the Black family and Sirius.

Maria smiled, "Since I was disowned, I don't really have a magically legal last name. So owls that include my old name don't find me. You have to use just my real first name."

James smiled briefly. Then he looked hard at Maria. "Christina is your youngest sister?" It was asked as a question, but both of them knew it really wasn't.

Maria looked shocked, "How do you know who Christina is? Grindelwald uses her in secret. She never appears in public."

"Oh, we have met a couple times," James answered with a mirthless smile. "She seemed quite taken with me."

Maria looked stunned. Then her eyes suddenly grew in shock. "Great Merlin's Ghost! You are him!" she said in whispered shock.

James took this opportunity to use a dash of Legilimency to push through Maria's natural shields. If Maria was to retain any knowledge of who Alan Rickman really was, he needed to know if she could be loyal and keep that secret. Unfortunately, James found that she was loyal to the cause of removing Grindelwald, her mental barriers were not any more substantial than that of any other witch or wizard.

Pulling out of her mind, James addressed her, "Yes, I am who you think I am. But know you have a choice to make."

Still in shock over the revelation of just who her guest was, Maria quietly repeated, "Choice?"

James nodded. "You have very weak mental barriers. If a Dark Army wizard who is halfway skilled at Legilimency approached you he could learn all of your secrets whether or not you are willing. I can either Oblivate you, or I can set up a temporary mental block. The block will keep you from being able to recall the information until you learn Occlumency."

"I know something of it." Maria said.

"I noticed it the first time we met. It actually gave away to me you are a witch. You know enough to hide involuntary facial expressions, but not enough to shield your mind. If you know what you are looking for the in-between state leaves a tell if you know what you are looking for."

Maria frowned, "How would I learn this?"

"Claude." James answered simply. "He is actually very good at it." James smirked, "It will give you two something to do besides play chess."

For the first time since entering the room, Maria laughed. "I will do that."

"Good, it will help you survive as a spy. Now, Maria, tell me how to meet your older sister."

Very late that night an SS Obersturmbannfuhrer (First Lieutenant) felt a sudden pain just above his left ankle. Spinning around he noticed a small multicolored snake slithering away. A sudden weakness washed over his body. He sank to the ground. Unable to move he heard very light footsteps approach.

"I am sorry, Obersturmbannfuhrer. I have need of your uniform and you are my size and build. That will make it easier for the potion."

The dying SS officer thought in a panic. 'Potion? What did that mean?' He felt his head gently raised off the ground and a horrible tasting liquid filling his mouth and rushing down his throat. The officer felt something in him shift in a particular way. Then he felt a floating sensation as his sight started to dim.

James banished the conjured coral snake and set about exchanging his clothes for those of the dead officer. The Polyjuice Potion would make everyone assume the body was that of one Alan Rickman, French 'voluntary' worker from Paris. Meanwhile, James had a train to catch.

Pulling on the German SS uniform, James found it to be just slightly too large for his size. He had spent all night looking for a junior officer who came close to his size. James snorted to himself, 'I guess I am a little short to be a stormtrooper.'

The train ran south towards the Alps. The Obersturmbannführer had orders to join a Waffen SS panzer until forming in the southern part of Germany. Rumor had it the unit was to deploy to North Africa with Rommel. James remembered from some general history books Rommel was respected by soldiers on both sides of the front as a superior soldier and strategist.

James actually owed his plan to a Bulgarian. During Harry's Seventh year Horcrux hunt, a certain Bulgarian Seeker offered an invitation to Durmstrang for some recovery time. Victor argued that Voldemort would never look for the Boy-Who-Lived in a school known for teaching the Dark Arts. Although Hermione really wanted a look at their library, Harry did not want to leave England in case he was needed.

The wards of Durmstrang prevented anyone not invited from knowing where the school was. It was hidden under something like a large Fidelius Charm, except one only needed an invitation from the Headmaster or an honored alumnus. First years received their invitations through their letters. Victor Krum, starting Seeker of the Bulgarian National Quidditch Team, was a very honored alumni. The wards recognized Victor's invitation as still being valid.

James pulled his borrowed SS officers cap down over his eyes. In a couple hours he would reach his destination of Ravensburg.

Serena looked like the sternest librarian this side of Hell. Her no-nonsense approach was broadcast in her appearance for all to see. She wore severe, utilitarian glasses. Thick, curly hair was pulled into a tight bun. She had the white pasty skin of a researcher more at home in dark catacombs than the outdoors. Her clothing looked like they had been picked out of a military catalog for uniformity. James bet she had a dozen of the same exact outfits at home.

Maria arranged for James to meet her elder sister in her natural environment, a library. The small magical village outside Ravensburg contained a small library that collected scrolls from various estates. A diligent researcher could sometimes find gems amongst the yellowing scrolls.

James sat down across from the witch and waited for her to notice him. James wore a normal everyday wizards robe over his purloined SS uniform. After five minutes, James cleared his throat.

The witch looked up in a start as James seemed to appear out of nowhere to her. She pursed her lips at James and gave him a disapproving stare. James was reminded of Professor McGonagall, Madam Pomfrey, and Madam Pince rolled into one. He barely contained an automatic guilty flinch.

In a quiet voice, James said, "Your unclaimed sister sent me."

"Prove it," a harsh voice challenged him.

"You had a crush on your Potions professor whilst at school. You sent him a love note during your Seventh year." Frankly, having now met this sister, he could not think of anything less likely.

The librarian from Hell looked angry. "She told you that!" she hissed in a whisper. "Only she would have so little tact!"

James had to fight not to grin. So it was true. "I take it you accept now I am from her."

“Yes,” Serena (a.k.a The Librarian from Hell) answered. Her little fit over, she settled back into a research mode.

“Maria told me you have something to tell me.”

Serena nodded, “It happened a few days ago, after the Dark Lord sent some of his wizards to steal information from the British Ministry of Magic.”

“What did they want to steal?”

“Birth records. They wanted to find someone named Gaunt.”

James’s heart almost stopped beating. They were looking for Tom. He was the last Gaunt left. “Why are they looking for him?”

Adjusting her glasses on her nose, Serena answered, “His deceased uncle claimed to be the Heir of Slytherin. The Dark Lord wants Slytherin’s research notes. They are supposed to be in the Chamber of Secrets. Slytherin did a great deal of research into reaching immortality. The Dark Lord feels he needs that knowledge to survive opening the Gate.”

James winced. “Crap”

“Language, sir. I will not listen to foul language.”

James ignored her. “So what happened?”

“They failed to get the records but two of the Dark Solders fought a young boy who spoke Parseltongue. He must be the Heir. There are no other Parselmouths known in Europe. The Dark Lord is sending wizards to track him down.”

Before James could respond a voice called from down the hall. “Serena? Serena darling, are you down here?” James recognized the voice.

Serena turned and called out, “I am down here, Christina.” When she turned back, her English visitor was missing.

Christina walked into the room followed by six Dark Solders. "Serena dear, you know you should not wander without your bodyguards."

The prim librarian glared at her youngest sister, "I am not a part of your little games, Christina. I am a researcher. I leave the rest of the rubbish to you."

Christina let out a giggle and hugged her older sister. Serena just stood there during the hug. Christina stepped back to smile affectionately at her sister. "Don't ever change. Come, Mother and Father are waiting for us. We must visit before I must leave again." Linking her arm in Serena's, Christina led the Dark Solders out of the library.

James stepped out of the shadows. He had to get back to England quickly. Grindelwald was targeting Tom. James had to be there to protect him.

James had briefly considered attacking Christina. However the close confines of the library meant James would most like take some serious injuries. Getting back to England whilst wounded would take too long. Tom needed him more then he needed to fight Christina.

As James left the village and made his way back to the train station as an SS lieutenant again, he wondered what the scariest thing he heard in Germany was. The fact the Dark Lord was after his son, or Christina giggling.

A/N: This was the longest chapter I have written to date. A bit of foreshadowing and character development added up to a lot of words. ;-)

I have had a lot of questions about pairings for Tom. At this point I have not planned anything firmly. He may date more then one of 'his' girls before the end of the story. If you would like to state your opinion and why, please post it in the Altered Destiny forum.

Thanks for reading!

Rick

Chapter 23 – Defending the Heir

8 January 1941

James Evans returned to England with a slight crack that echoed in the predawn hours of Hogsmeade. The village was dark as a dog shaped animal ran from the point a man stood only a second before.

Only a centaur standing just inside the Forbidden Forest saw the wolf-animagus run through the village. The wolf ran so fast he seemed to float over the snow blanketing the ground. In a short time, the wolf reached his destination.

The large wolf was met at the destination by an even larger dog. The large dog gave a low ‘woof!’ in greeting. Then the dog sat on his haunches and cocked his head at the wolf. Wolf-James had no problem interpreting the expression. ‘Everything is fine here. Do you think I would let something happen to my boy?’

James returned to his human form, pats Snuffles on the head, and walked into the house. The wards recognized James and allowed him to open the door. James immediately made his way through the dark house to Tom’s room. He slowly opened the door to see Tom sound asleep in his bed. Two additional heads poking out of the blankets told James that Katie and Michael had snuck into their brother’s bed.

James slumped in relief at the sight. For the last thirty-six hours, James had not stopped moving. In his stolen SS uniform, James talked his way onto a Luftwaffe bomber being transferred to the Normandy coast. James slipped off the German air base. Changing to his wolf form, James ran inland for over an hour. A dozen or more miles away from the airbase, James opened his trunk. Two old friends came out of the trunk; his father’s invisibility cloak and the Firebolt. Only the very front of the broom was not covered by the cloak.

As James existed France over the Channel wards sounded on both sided of the Channel. The British wards recognized The Count’s magical signature and merely reported his return to England. The Dark Army wards alerted Grindelwald’s forces that an unauthorized broom flight had left France. This is why James did not leave directly

from the airbase. He did not want a Dark Army team to backtrack the travels of a mysterious SS lieutenant. In his hurry, James did not really care the Dark Army knew he left their territory. He was sure that a large number of their analysts would be stuck in pointless meetings discussing what the Count could have been doing in France.

A glass clinked in the kitchen bringing James back to an alert state. He ghosted down the hall until he could peek into the room.

“Come in, James. I was expecting you soon.”

James stepped out of the shadows. “What are you doing here, Elizabeth? Is Sarah okay?”

Cradling Ron in one arm, Elizabeth Potter finished pouring herself a cup of tea. After a quick glance at her grandson, she poured him one as well. James settled into his chair as she completed her ritual of preparing the tea. Finished, she took a sip and then set the cup down. Ron continued his serious business of sleeping on her shoulder.

“You have heard what happened to Sarah and Tommy on New Year’s Eve?” She asked it like a question but it was more a statement.

“No details.” James sipped his tea. Elizabeth’s body language reassured James. It told him there was no immediate crisis.

“Sarah is sleeping. She received a concussion when Tom pushed her out of the way of a Dark Wizard’s curse. It is all healed up and she is fine now. The attack shook her up very much. I came to help out with the little ones.”

Elizabeth Potter gave Harry Potter his courage and iron determination to protect his loved ones. Looking at his grandmother, James could feel the magic pouring off of her in her anger thinking about the attack on her granddaughter-in-law and her adopted great-grandson. James was reminded of a certain incident in a Headmaster’s office after his Fifth year.

Thomas and Elizabeth Potter married late in life for magical couples. Although wizards and witches lived about 75-90 percent longer than Muggles on average, they tended to marry before the age of twenty.

(A witch or wizard's level of raw magical power dictated how much greater their life span would be than a Muggle.) Since most wizards and witches in Britain attended Hogwarts, they really got to know the limited pool of others in their age brackets. The Potters followed a different path. Thomas left school ten years before Elizabeth. It was not for ten years after Elizabeth left school that they married. Elizabeth played as a Chaser on the all-female Harpies Quidditch squad and did not settle down until after her retirement.

At 85 years old, Elizabeth Potter looked like a Muggle woman of 40. James knew his father would not be born (if he was in this timeline) until 1959. That would make Elizabeth 103 years old when his father was born or about 56 for a Muggle woman. In Harry's original timeline, both Thomas and Elizabeth Potter died of old age shortly before the birth of one Harry James Potter. Sirius once mentioned to Harry that James got away with a lot since his parents spoiled him because of his late birth.

James forced himself to use some of his Occlumency skills to maintain his calm. "What happened after Sarah was injured?"

Elizabeth gave James the complete rundown on the fight in Diagon Alley. James was relieved Tom did not have to kill anyone himself. Aside from the normal parent's concern that their barely 14 year-old son would have killed another person; James also worried about the emotional impact killing would have on Tom's efforts to fight the Slytherin curse.

James sipped his tea. "How is Tom handling this?"

"As well as be expected I guess." Elizabeth gave a little frown. "Some of his friends came to visit when they heard. Young Nott seems a fine boy. Some of the young ladies however seemed a little too competitive for my taste, too old fashioned Pureblood."

The elicited a genuine laugh from James. "Elizabeth, you are too much. I bet you drove them crazy when you were growing up."

Elizabeth gave a little mischievous smile in return. "I think it is safe to say the Bones Family was a little shook-up." James had been

surprised a couple years prior learning Elizabeth Bones Potter was the great-aunt of his former schoolmate, Susan Bones.

James finished his tea. "I am going in to check on Sarah and then going to sleep. I've been up for a day and a half."

"I am going to put little Ronny down to bed and then go to sleep myself."

James stood and gave his grandmother a kiss on the cheek. "Could you please ask Thomas and Albus to stop by tomorrow after lunch? I have some things we need to discuss."

Elizabeth looked into James's eyes and nodded her agreement.

Sarah Evans was quite enthusiastically happy to find her husband home the next morning. James was slightly awakened when she curled up against his chest. Things started to get interesting. James once again decided never to leave home again.

Before things could get too interesting, the bane of every parent's private life struck. James and Sarah received a double dose as twin raiders charged their room like goblins after a loose pile of Galleons. The raiders' war cries were all the parents warning before the twin hellions assaulted the bed.

James felt a small body slam into his back. He opened his eyes to look up. Hanging over his shoulder sat Hellion Number One with a huge smile on her face.

"How old are you?" came the low growled question.

A cheerful bubble answered the growl. "Three!"

"Do you want to reach four?"

Katie threw her arms around James's neck and giggled. "Daddy, you are silly!" James groaned and tried to pull the blanket up over his head. This caused more giggling from his eldest daughter.

Sarah was undergoing her own assault by Hellion Number Two, aka Michael, although she seemed to be tickling him in retaliation.

Without verbally discussing it, James and Sarah realized it would not do any good to stay in bed. James dragged the Hellions to breakfast while Sarah made her way to the shower. James found Tom (The Hellion Chief) sitting at the table and helping Elizabeth feed Ron and Tia (Hellions Three and Four, respectively) Tom was laughing as Hellion Four (Tia) had dumped an entire bowl of oatmeal on Hellion Three's head. Hellion Three (Ron) did not seem to care as he calmly ate the food dripping down his face.

James watched in amusement as the scene in front of him unfolded. 'I guess the food thing goes with the name,' James mused watching Ron.

Katie announced their arrival. "We brought Daddy! Mummy's taken a shower. She was stinky!" Then she giggled, "Mummy wasn't wear'n all her clothes!"

James fought laughing and blushing at the same time. Elizabeth laughed openly, while Tom looked slightly sick. The thought of how he would feel about the image of Petunia and Vernon in bed together would have made him sick at fourteen too. Then he reconsidered, that thought still could make him sick!

Tom walked over to James and said in a low voice, "I am really glad to see you home, dad."

James looked into Tom's eyes and saw guilt and fear. James embraced Tom and answered, "I am glad to be home too."

James glanced around the table. He had to wonder if this much raw magical power had met since the Four Hogwarts Founders. The first was Albus Dumbledore, Hogwarts' Transfiguration Master and Slayer of Grindelwald in another timeline. Next was Tom Evans, known as the Dark Lord Voldemort in another life, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Then there was himself, Harry James Potter Evans, aka The Count and The Boy-Who-Lived, Slayer of the aforementioned Lord Voldemort. There was no simple way of comparing their magical power but based on the group's magical feats in both timelines,

James was willing to put the three of them up against anyone on a pure power level.

With a snort, James looked around the rest of the table. The others around the table were no Squibs either. Thomas and Elizabeth Potter, Mr. Abel, and Sarah Evans rounded out the group sitting around the Evans' kitchen table.

James started the meeting. "Thank you all for coming. As you all know, I recently returned from abroad. I came across some information that caused me to cut my mission short." He glanced at Mr. Able. "The DoM agreed with my decision when I reported in today."

"You are all aware of the attack on the Ministry that Sarah and Tom became involved with. However, I learned from an informant what their objective was." James turned his head to look directly at Tom. "They want to use the Heir of Slytherin to access the Chamber of Secrets. The Dark Soldier who escaped heard Tom use parseltongue. Since they believe there is only one Parselmouth in England, they are now hunting for Tom."

Tom's face dropped at the news. The shocked reaction was mirrored around the table by everyone but Mr. Abel.

"Should young Mr. Evans be here for this conversation?" Dumbledore asked. "This should not be a concern for one his age."

James frowned at the Transfiguration professor. "Albus, Tom has to be here. The question of should he have to deal with this issue is moot. Grindelwald decided to involve Tom, not me. He needs to be included so he does not make mistakes due to not having all of the information." The last was said in a growl as James remembered all the information this man's future self hid from him.

Albus looked a little startled by James's vehemence and sat back in his chair.

"James, are you sure that want Tom?" Sarah asked in a concerned voice.

James sighed, "As sure as I can be. Too many of the details from the informant fit. The informant had no way of knowing who I was or my connection to Tom."

Sarah reached over and took Tom's hand. The fourteen year old looked stunned at the news.

"Tom, I want to tell you we will do everything we can to protect you. I am reactivating the Fidelous Charm on the house. I will be staying in the area at least until we are sure of our protections."

"Dad, what about Katie and Michael?" Tom asked.

James grimaced. "Fortunately, they are looking for a teenage boy with no solid description. I do think they will identify you quickly, Tom. Only the family really knows about the twins. Once they identify you, they won't pay attention to the twins. I think the twins are too young to be of any help to them anyway."

Tom still looked concerned for his younger siblings. James felt proud Tom was more concerned about them then himself.

Sarah squeezed Tom's hand, "I will keep the twins in the house or on our property. No one can get in here without an invitation."

Tom looked relieved. Then he asked, "How will they know about me soon?"

Professor Dumbledore answered that one. "You have not been shy about using your special talents, young Tom. All of Slytherin House and most of Hogwarts knows of your scaly affinity. I do not doubt my former schoolmate has informers in the school."

James recognized the slight twinkle in Albus's eyes. Although not nearly as pronounced as in Harry's time at Hogwarts, the professor still had a way of using his power to calm and influence people into doing what he wanted.

Mr. Abel cleared his throat. "Minister Nott has authorized the DMLE to provide additional Aurors to be stationed in Hogsmeade and

Hogwarts. We would be interested in destroying the Chamber to prevent it from falling in Grindelwald's hands."

James looked at his nominal boss skeptically. "You want to destroy it?"

Mr. Abel grinned unrepentantly, "Yes, after cataloging its contents."

"No, we won't open it now and I want to review the materials before we allow any cataloging."

Dumbledore looked curious. "Why not, James? It seems a logical idea to me."

James shrugged, "Mostly because I don't want to wake the 60 foot long basilisk sleeping down there when there are students in the castle."

Abel and Dumbledore looked shocked. "There is a basilisk in my school?" Dumbledore demanded.

"I'd guess it was more under the lake, actually." Dumbledore started to get angry so James raised a calming hand. "Albus, that snake has been asleep for almost 1,000 years. It is no more a risk today then it was when you and Thomas were a First year."

Tom asked in an innocent voice, "Wasn't that about the time Great-grandpa Salazar put his pet to sleep?"

The Potters and Evans laughed at Tom's question. Dumbledore gave Tom a bland, disapproving look.

"Lighten up, Albus," Thomas Potter commented.

Dumbledore turned his gaze on his old friend. "You were there at the same time!"

"Yah," Thomas returned with an unrepentant grin, "and sometimes it feels like it has been a thousand years!"

Dumbledore's lips curled slightly and a twinkle crept into his eyes. "True." Tom relaxed a bit when he realized the deputy headmaster was playing with him.

For a second, James looked at Dumbledore. This Albus Dumbledore was not the same man that Harry Potter met in 1991. That Albus had already defeated Grindelwald and been the Headmaster of Hogwarts for many years. He had fought Voldemort's first rise. He served as the Head of the Wizengamut and the International Confederation of Wizards. Basically, the Dumbledore Harry met spent over forty-five years carrying the weight of the Wizarding World's hope on his shoulders.

This Albus, while renowned as a powerful wizard and accomplished researcher, did not command instant awe and hero worship. Since he also did not have the tendency to 'believe his own press', James rather preferred this Albus on the whole.

"Can we get back on topic?" Elizabeth asked in a no-nonsense tone. James grinned to himself to see Thomas Potter, Albus Dumbledore, and Tom Evans, immediately sit up straight at her tone. "What can we do to ensure my grandson is properly protected while at school?"

"Albus, can we get permission for Snuffles to stay with Tom during the week?" Sarah asked.

Dumbledore nodded, "I believe so. Snuffles has become a well-known, and loved, fixture on the Hogwarts grounds. His presence during the week will not cause a problem now."

Tom snorted, "Snuffles is the most popular creature on campus. I found him in the Hufflepuff common room the weekend before holidays. Sometimes I think all the girls hang around me to get at Snuffles."

His mother winked at him, "I am sure that is not the only reason." Tom blushed to the rest of the table's amusement.

"Might I suggest we send you to Hogwarts also, James?" Mr. Able asked.

James frowned, "Wouldn't an Unspeakable lurking around raise questions?"

"Not if you went undercover."

"As?" James asked.

Mr. Abel shrugged, "I would suggest use the cover of James Evans."

Thomas laughed, "That's a new one. Using your real identity as a cover for your fake one."

Mr. Abel smiled, "It might happen more often than you think." He looked around the table. "No one will question the presence of James Evans, founder of the largest private magical educational institution in Europe."

"Not to mention, only" Thomas quipped.

Mr. Abel nodded. "Yes, only. James is also known for teaching defense classes for Aurors."

James frowned. "I am not sure I like that idea. I was a little too vocal about my past experiences when I first arrived here. If someone starts digging, they will be able to connect James Evans and The Count."

"That is a risk," Mr. Abel agreed. "We can ask one or two other Unspeakables to make appearances around the Ministry as The Count when James Evans is known to be elsewhere. If Snuffles is to be seen around campus, isn't it possible he could bring a friend along?"

James snorted, "You mean like a wolf?"

"Possibly."

Albus sighed, "At least the prank rate will go down."

“Are you sure, old man?” Elizabeth scoffed. She pointed at Thomas and James. “I’ve heard these two plotting with their young apprentice over there.”

“Oh, dear.” Dumbledore looked concerned. James would have bought it if not for the slight twinkle.

11 January 1941

Tom walked from Hogsmeade up to Hogwarts to start his new term. Snuffles and wolf-James ranged all around him, playing. “I can’t wait to become an Animagus too,” Tom grumped. “Those two are having way too much fun.”

Tom didn’t notice the two ‘playing’ animals investigated every bush, tree or stump between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts before Tom entered spell range.

Entering Hogwarts, Snuffles and wolf-James took up positions flanking Tom. Tom led the way down to the Slytherin dorms. The Express had not arrived so only a few students that remained over the holidays were in the common room. Unfortunately, one of them was Dolohov.

“Who said you could bring that dog in here?” the burly boy demanded. “And what’s this other mutt?”

The wolf sat calmly with bright emerald eyes and considered the large Slytherin Third year. Then he gave the boy a wolf grin with his tongue hanging out the side.

Dolohov felt a sudden chill looking at the large dog. To cover his fear, he asked, “What kind of dog is that anyway?”

Tom continued on his way to his dorm. He absently replied, “He is not a dog. He is a wolf. He followed Snuffles home one night from the Forbidden Forest. Dumbledore said it was okay.”

“A wolf! You can’t bring a wolf in here! It’s dangerous.”

James slowly approached the yelling Third year. Dolohov went white as the wolf approached him. In his panic, he didn't even draw his wand. James stalked up and then circled the young wizard sniffing him.

Tom felt a sudden fear as James suddenly gave his son a mischievous glance. Belatedly he remembered that The Count was originally his father's prankster nickname, not an Unspeakable's codename. 'Oh Merlin!'

The large wolf paused and raised his rear leg. Tom looked on in shock as a stream of yellow liquid splashed against Dolohov's leg. Dolohov never moved until James moved away from him.

Then all hell broke loose.

"I am going to Professor Slughorn about this! I will have that mangy wolf skinned!" Dolohov ranted.

Tom drew his wand and pointed at Dolohov's leg. "*Scrougify!*" Then he put his wand away. "There, all cleaned up."

"I am still going to the Head of House! I'll have that stupid mutt as a throw rug under my bed!" Dolohov stormed out of the common room in mid-rant.

Tom looked at his father. "I thought you were supposed to be the mature one here?"

The wolf just seemed to laugh at the boy. His expression seemed to say, 'Don't blame me. I am an innocent wolf.'

Shaking his head, Tom walked down to his dorm. Snuffles and wolf-James settled by the fireplace in two clumps of fur. Looking back at his canine protectors, Tom realized this was going to be an interesting term.

Tom was reading his transfiguration text when the Slytherins returned. The portal opened to reveal a flood of students laughing and chatting. Tom looked up at the noise. Snuffles ignored the crowd while wolf-

James looked on curiously. Nagini lay curled in his accustomed spot atop Snuffles.

“Tom! You’re already back!” Nott yelled as he spied his best mate. He walked quickly over to the couch where Tom laid reading. Then he spotted James lying next to Snuffles. “Wow, did Snuffles get a girlfriend?”

Nott blanched as the wolf raised his head and growled at the boy. Tom laughed at the look on his friend’s face. “Actually, the wolf is a male. He just decided to tag along one day. I apparently have no say in it.”

“It’s a wild wolf?” Nott asked looking nervous.

Tom grinned, “Don’t worry, he seems harmless enough. I’d say he is housebroken too, but he just relieved himself on Dolohov’s leg.”

Nott laughed at the image. “Then he stays! Any animal that pisses on that git deserves to stay.” James gave him a grin and wagged his tail in response.

Any further conversation was stopped due to a second invasion wave into the Slytherin common room. This was an entirely female invasion consisting of the Third year Slytherin girls plus Ella and Andrea.

Looking up, Nott remarked in a dry voice, “Your harem has arrived.”

Tom shot his friend a dirty look.

“What? They are my friends too but they follow you around. I swear the only reason Evan is hanging around with us this year is he has a crush on one of the girls. Being your friend is the only way to get close to any of them.” Nott gave his friend a cheeky grin. “I guess it is just your animal magnetism. After all...” Nott trailed off but looked at the clump of animals lying by the fire with a grin.

James let out a barking laugh and thumped his tail loudly on the floor.

Tom looked at the wolf (who was enjoying himself way too much) and realized he was living in a teenage wizard’s nightmare. His father

would be hearing all of his conversations with his friends and those friends wouldn't know not to say certain things in front of the 'wolf'.

He wasn't reassured when the wolf winked at him. Tom realized James understood exactly what his son had just realized. When the wolf shook his head slightly, Tom realized his father would try not to intrude on his privacy.

Mary was the first to notice the group by the fire. As she bounced over she noticed something that diverted her attention. "Snuffles!" she yelled out. Then she ran over to wrap her arms around the large dog.

Tom glanced at Nott. "I think your animal magnetism was focused on the wrong animal." Nott grinned back without saying a word.

The other girls followed Mary over towards the fireplace. They paused when Ella noticed James lying not far from where Mary was currently wrapped around Snuffles.

"Is that a wolf?" the Polish witch asked.

"Yep."

"Why is there a wolf in your common room?"

"To make it an uncommon room?" Tom suggested innocently.

Ella shot Tom a dirty look. "Is he safe?"

Tom shrugged while trying not to laugh. "He is a bit standoffish. He won't allow you to pet him but he won't hurt you either. He's Snuffle's friend."

James glanced at his son and then at the girls. He gave them a lazy dog grin and wagged his tail slightly. He slowly rose up on his paws and padded over to the couch. The whole room seemed to wait to see what the wolf would do. James slowly circled around the frozen group of students and sniffed them.

James and Tom decided last night that wolf-James would not be an overly friendly visitor. While playing tricks on the student population

would be amusing, it could lead to issues later on. Imagine Laura or one of the others wrapping herself around the wolf only to find out later it was her friend's father. (The thought made James very uncomfortable also!)

The sniffing served a very real purpose. James committed each of the student's scents to memory. Polyjuice and glamours did not typically cover smells.

After circling the group, James drifted off to a shadowed corner of the common room. The position would allow him to keep an eye on the students while not being too obvious. Conversation in the room slowly returned to normal. Eventually the common room seemed completely normal, except for the occasional glances at the wolf in the corner.

The appearance of the wolf in Hogwarts created chaos for the first couple of days. The Wolf (as James was called by the students) and Snuffles never really stayed with Tom during the day. Snuffles would walk with him sometimes between classes, but the Wolf stayed away from the crowds. Part of this was part of his cover of a wild, if magical, wolf. Another part came from not wanting to be obvious as protection for Tom.

The Wolf seemed to inhabit the shadows of Hogwarts. He seemed to appear out of the shadows that had been empty only moments ago. The rumor ran amongst the students the he was a mythical Shadow Wolf, able to travel from shadow to shadow. The truth was not as grand. As a student, Harry learned all of the good hiding places and secret passages during his adventures. Turning into a bat also allowed him to move from place to place unseen. He found the Shadow Wolf rumor to be highly amusing though.

The only class the Wolf attended with Tom was Transfiguration. James enjoyed watching his old (and deceased) Headmaster teaching. Albus would often address the wolf with a greeting before class. Most of the students felt this confirmed the theory their professor was going barmy. James and Fawkes would keep each other company although their games of "Chase-the-Phoenix" were very disruptive to the class.

The next four weeks were highly educational for James. He learned more about Tom from watching him with his peers than in all the years since his arrival.

Tom's ability with people astonished James. Following his son through classes and free time, James watched Tom interact with people from all of the Houses. People seemed drawn to him and trusted his opinion. Tom was the undisputed leader of the younger Slytherins. The older Slytherins tended to treat Tom on the same level as a Prefect. Outside Slytherin, Tom was respected by all of the Houses. Aside from the Third year Richelieu boys, Tom was the undisputed leader of the students under Fifth year.

Tom's grades did play a role in his status. Tom displayed a devotion to his studies that would have done Hermione proud. It actually made James feel slightly ashamed about his own level of effort in his Third year.

On top of his grades, Tom showed hints of the power he would one day wield. The raw magical talent was unmatched by any other student. James had noticed the wizards and witches tended to automatically defer to stronger magic users. (It helped explain why Dumbledore had so much power in Harry's time.) The students seemed to recognize Tom's power and accepted his status.

Combining Tom's personality, his intellect, and his power, James could start to see how Voldemort gained the fanatical followers to form the Death Eaters. If Tom Riddle had half the influence of Tom Evans, he would have been a serious force to be reckoned with. James expected Tom Riddle probably had more influence. After all, Tom Riddle had an agenda. Tom Evans was just being himself with no ulterior motive.

James particularly enjoyed observing Tom's friends and people James knew from Harry's time at Hogwarts. Hagrid seemed a happy little kid (for a 6 foot tall First year). He bounced through his classes with a naïve excitement that reminded James of the Creevey brothers rendered on a much larger scale and with no camera. Although he was on the lower half of the scale for both grades and power,

Hagrid's open personality made him something of a pet for the older Gryffindors.

James's favorite Gryffindor to watch was Minerva McGonagall. James remembered meeting her twice in this time. Once was on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ where she lectured James and Tom on their behavior. The next time was outside the Gryffindor Tower the night of the Dark Army attack. That night she broke curfew to find out what was going on. Her reputation around the school was a no-nonsense student who had never received a detention or lost a House point. None of these things broke James's image of his stern professor from fifty years in the future and Hermione's hero.

The image was shattered one night when James learned why James Potter and the Marauders were the stern professor's favorite students. If any one had been watching they would have been stunned to find a large wolf rolling on the floor making whining laughing noises.

Minerva McGonagall was the Gryffindor prankster.

James was patrolling the school late at night in his wolf form. Snuffles was wandering the lower levels of the castle. In one of the upper halls, James found a cloaked figure conjuring water balloons and charming them to hand unseen above the portal to the Ravenclaw Tower. The balloons were green and silver. James watched for any sign the cloaked figure was a Dark Army infiltrator. James stole up quietly on the unknown intruder prepared to attack. The figure turned to see the wolf approaching her. James stopped in shock when he recognized the girl.

Minerva gave wolf-James a wicked smile and put her finger to her lips. With a small giggle, the Fourth year Gryffindor crept quietly back to her dorm. James could only sit and watch her leave in stunned disbelief. The only coherent thought in his brains as he watched her leave was, 'I guess she hasn't figured out her Animagus form yet.' Then he fell over laughing. Sirius, Remus, and the Weasley twins would have paid good Galleons to have this kind of information on their Head of House.

The wolf continued on his patrol that night with his tail wagging at the thought of his pranking Head of House.

Tom's 'inner circle' of friends provided items of interest also. As a group the Slytherins were a diverse group in many ways. All of them were Purebloods and shared a certain level of ambition as members of Slytherin. However, aside from that, the group seemed fairly open. James wondered if his Slytherin classmates had been the same away from the rest of the school or if Voldemort's influence prevented that diversity

Nott reminded James in some ways of Ron. Nott appeared completely loyal to Tom. As a Slytherin though, he did have ambitions of his own. While Nott didn't have the natural arrogance of his Minister father, he did have a certain willingness to bend the rules to get what he wanted. James also noticed that, like Ron, Nott seemed to prefer to allow Tom to take the lead role. Nott let Tom take the lead while he made snarky comments from the back. Tom made a comment about this once to Nott who replied, "Of course I let you take the lead, mate. You draw all the fire."

Mary reminded James on the surface of a 1940's version of Parvati and Lavender. Only on the very surface though. Mary acted as the social director for the group. She was *THE* authority on social behavior, dress, and society. If you wanted to know anything about Pureblood history and traditions, she was your witch. Mary could have been obnoxious about her society focus but she also knew when those traditions were ridiculous and out of date. Her cutting remarks and accurate characterizations of the Pureblood left the group howling when she climbed on her soapbox. James wondered if Daphne Greengrass had her (probable) grand-aunt's cutting humor behind her Slytherin façade.

James decided there was no bloody way Laura Parkinson was related to Pansy. Laura was closer to Molly Weasley than Pansy. Laura was the 'mom' of the group. She checked homework and pestered people to not skip meals. Laura 'adopted' certain students as hers to mother. James did notice they all seemed to be gifted in some way greater than their classmates. James decided Laura was a kinder, gentler version of Slughorn. Laura may not have been aware of it, but she was building a network of students loyal to her who would one day occupy key positions in government, business, or magic.

Xurana refused to be figured out by James. She was a lovely girl who was the most intellectually gifted of the Slytherin girls. She was also the closest of the Slytherins to Tom in terms of raw power. (She was not close, but still the closest.) James noticed she spent a great deal of time observing those around her and analyzing what they said. James did not think her friends realized this as her face changed when she thought some one might be looking. She reminded James of a young Charlie. He decided she would probably make a good Unspeakable or spy if she learned Occlumency.

Of the non-Slytherins, James decided Ella would either have been Sorted into Slytherin or Hufflepuff, Andrea would probably have made a great Gryffindor, and Janek would have been a Ravenclaw.

Ela Zamoyska appeared the mirror image of Laura. Laura acted the Hufflepuff for Slytherin reasons, while Ella used Slytherin tactics to get Hufflepuff results. She was the peacekeeper, judge and jury of disputes within the group. She would use sweet reason to get tempers cooled. If that failed she would use any means necessary to put the malcontents into a suitably humbled state. She shared a lot of traits with Sarah. James wondered about Helga Hufflepuff's reaction to a "Hardcore 'Puff"?

Andrea Sardonnnes was a textbook Gryffindor. She combined Hermione's love of learning with Ron's ability to go charging off on a full head of steam. The French half veela witch jumped into everything with both feet, never bothering to see if there was a bottom, never mind how deep it may be. As the student who went after the Philospoher's Stone, the Chamber of Secrets and other misadventures as a student, James realized he had been the same way. (He conceded that with a very large wince.) As a veela, Andrea was easily the best looking girl at Hogwarts. However, she treated anyone who reacted purely to her looks the same way Harry Potter reacted to the fangirls of the Boy-Who-Lived.

The final member of Tom's inner circle was Janek Nowicki. The Polish wizard was easily the quietest of the group. He was also the brightest of them with a sly sense of humor. James suspected him of helping Tom with some of the more subtle pranks played during the first half of the year. Janek was also a natural flyer. Watching him fly

James wondered if another Eastern European wizard he knew could have been related to Janek. Whether Krum had Polish blood or not, the two wizards had very similar flying styles and ability. Janek, however, had no interest in going into professional Quidditch. He planned to go into magical research and spell creation. James felt the young wizard helped ground the group's flightier ideas.

1 April 1941

Two wizards stood on the dueling platform watching each other carefully. Each had their wand drawn. They had been dueling for over an hour. Curse marks pocked the walls. The center of the dueling platform looked like it had been set on fire. Little rubber ducks filled one corner of the room. (Don't ask.) Without a warning, the older of the two fired a spell without fully extending his wand.

"Frigium!" The light blue spell fired out of the wand, straight at the younger wizard's feet.

The spell caused a thin layer of ice to form on the platform. The young wizard landed on the side of it. "Hah!" he yelled. "Did you think I would fall for that one like you did Malfoy? Come on, I'm not stupid!"

The older wizard smirked and wordlessly gestured at the ice with his wand. The movement did not seem to be a spell. Suddenly an icy hand reached up to grasp the edge of the younger wizard's robe. The wizard yelled as it pulled him off balance. He toppled to the floor. His momentary distraction caused him to be hit with a over-powered Tickling Charm.

"S-s-stop it, Dad! I- I- can't g-get my b-breath!"

James Evans walked up to the writhing form of his son on the ground. "Are you going to stop running your mouth off in a duel?" he asked with a grin.

"Y-yes!" the giggling boy yelled.

"Finite."

Tom struggled to his feet and tried to catch his breath. He glared at his father watching from the comfort of a lounge chair called up by the Room of Requirement.

“Sometimes I think my Dumbledore was wrong. I don’t think the “power he knows not” was love.”

Tom looked at James in curiosity. It still bothered him to think the path he could have gone down and still might if the curse worked, but it also was a morbid curiosity for him. After all, that Tom Riddle had all the power and gifts of this Tom Evans.

“What do you think it was then?”

“The power to keep my mouth shut. Moldieshorts was always talking during the duels. I think it is an evil villain thing. He would mouth off and I used the time to escape or curse him. He was too busy trying to scare me or prove how tough he was to pay attention to his work. Kind of like someone else I know...”

Tom groaned. “How did you get me? I never saw a spell.”

James grinned, “Hello? Room of Requirement?”

“You cheated!” Tom shouted in outrage.

“I prefer to think I improvised and adapted. We never said it was against the rules.” James smiled unrepentantly. Before Tom could start on a tantrum, James said, “Let’s work on your Animagus ability now”

The Third year smiled although he recognized the subject change. “Great! I think I caught sight of my form last night whilst I was meditating.”

“Really? What was it?”

Tom shrugged, “I’m not sure. I think it was some type of cat.”

James was impressed. Not many wizards could develop an Animagus form. For a Third year it would be astonishing. The

Marauders managed it after their Fifth year. James did it after his Sixth.

“Dad, how did you get two forms?” Tom asked.

James smiled slightly in remembrance. “A Muggle author once wrote, ‘Always listen to experts. They’ll tell you what can’t be done, and why. Then do it.’ My Transfiguration professor and her prize student, who was one of my best friends, annoyed me by saying I could never do it. I was in a bad mood and didn’t want to hear it. So I went out and did it to prove them wrong.”

Tom laughed, “I think you got tricked, Dad. Were they in Slytherin?”

“Hermione and Min in Slytherin? Nope, they were Gryffindor.”

“Dad, the best way to get you to do anything is to tell you that you can’t do it! Mum uses it on you all the time! Even Katie and Michael know it. Hell, I bet Ron and Tia have too.”

“Language, Tom,” James said absently. Then he stood up with a shocked expression. “THOSE WITCHES MANIPULATED ME!”

Tom rolled laughing on the floor. “Dad, I think the ‘power I knew not’ is the fact you have no reverse gear. Someone probably told you that you were too young to fight Voldemort or not skilled enough. It must have driven you batty!”

James ignored the pun in his shock. “They all did that! Ron, Hermione, Ginny, the whole damn Order! They are lucky that are dead or not born yet! Wait Dumbledore is here! He was the ringleader!”

Tom started to get nervous visions of his father storming off to pick a duel with the Transfiguration professor. “Umm, Dad?”

James suddenly stopped in mid-rant and looked down at his son. Then he calmly sat down. “At least I would if I hadn’t figured this out years ago. Ginny teased me about it the morning before the final battle. We were saying our goodbyes. I told her to stay alive or I would practice Necromancy and raise her. She told me I couldn’t do

that. So, I charge off into the past like a Gryffindor to prevent my friends from every being killed.” James shrugged, “What can I say? I hate people saying I can’t do something.”

The conversation was cut short by a slight ping coming from James’s pocket. He reached into his robe any pulled out a small coin. Any member of the D.A. would have recognized it. The DoM placed additional charms on the coin to allow more information to be sent. He closed his eyes for a second to listen to the message and then looked at Tom in shock.

“Grindelwald’s launched an invasion on the coast of England!”

A/N: Yes, it is an evil cliffie! The next chapter will cover the invasion.

James’s quote comes from Lazarus Long in Time Enough for Love by Robert Heinlein. One of the classic SF novels.

Timeline: 1941

Jan - Feb – British and Australian troops make advances against Italian units in Tobruk and Italian Somaliland.

Feb 1941 - German General Erwin Rommel and his ‘Afrika Korps arrive in Tripoli, North Africa.

March 7, 1941 - British forces arrive in Greece.

March 11, 1941 - President Roosevelt signs the Lend-Lease Act.

March 27, 1941 - A coup in Yugoslavia overthrows the pro-Axis government.

April 6, 1941 - Nazis invade Greece and Yugoslavia.

April 17, 1941 - Yugoslavia surrenders to the Nazis.

April 27, 1941 - Greece surrenders to the Nazis.

May 10, 1941 - Deputy Führer Rudolph Hess flies to Scotland.

May 10/11 - Heavy German bombing of London; British bomb Hamburg.

May 15, 1941 - Operation Brevity begins (the British counter-attack in Egypt).

May 24, 1941 - Sinking of the British ship Hood by the Bismarck.

May 27, 1941 - Sinking of the Bismarck by the British Navy.

June 8, 1941 - Allies invade Syria and Lebanon.

June 14, 1941 - United States freezes German and Italian assets in America.

June 22, 1941 - Germany attacks Soviet Union as Operation Barbarossa begins.

In June - Nazi SS Einsatzgruppen begin mass murder.

June 28, 1941 - Germans capture Minsk.

July 3, 1941 - Stalin calls for a scorched earth policy.

July 12, 1941 - Mutual Assistance agreement between British and Soviets.

July 14, 1941 - British occupy Syria.

July 26, 1941 - Roosevelt freezes Japanese assets in United States and suspends relations.

July 31, 1941 - Göring instructs Heydrich to prepare for the Final Solution.

Aug 1, 1941 - United States announces an oil embargo against aggressor states.

Aug 14, 1941 - Roosevelt and Churchill announce the Atlantic Charter.

Aug 20, 1941 - Nazi siege of Leningrad begins.

Sept 1, 1941 - Nazis order Jews to wear yellow stars.

Sept 3, 1941 - First experimental use of gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Sept 19, 1941 - Nazis take Kiev.

Sept 29, 1941 - Nazis murder 33,771 Jews at Kiev.

Oct 2, 1941 - Operation Typhoon begins (German advance on Moscow).

Oct 16, 1941 - Germans take Odessa.

Oct 24, 1941 - Germans take Kharkov.

Oct 30, 1941 - Germans reach Sevastopol.

Nov 20, 1941 - Germans take Rostov.

Nov 27, 1941 - Soviet troops retake Rostov.

Dec 5, 1941 - German attack on Moscow is abandoned.

Dec 6, 1941 - Soviet Army launches a major counter-offensive around Moscow.

Dec 7, 1941 - Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor; Hitler issues the Night and Fog decree.

Dec 8, 1941 - United States and Britain declare war on Japan.

Dec 11, 1941 - Germany declares war on the United States.

Dec 19, 1941 - Hitler takes complete command of the German Army.

Chapter 24 – Invasion

1 April 1941

Hopton, England

A cold drizzling rain filled the sky over the village of Hopton. Situated on the English coast, Hopton lay several miles north of the closest town of Lowestoft and southeast of the city of Norwich. The start of the Second World War brought a great deal of change to the sleepy village. Prior to the war, it was a sleepy backwater. The villagers continued in their lives the way they had done for decades, if not centuries. Change came slowly to the area. At least until the war started.

After the Nazi invasion of France, the British army built defensive works all along the coast. All along the coast, people lived in fear of a German Blitzkrieg across the English Channel. Military men and equipment filled the lanes and paths up and down the eastern coast of England. The once sleepy tranquility destroyed by the sounds of heavy trucks, tanks, and weapons training. Off-duty soldiers filled its pubs. The RAF flew sorties out of temporary airfields sitting several miles off the coast. The roars of their Rolls-Royce and Merlin engines filled the air at all hours of the day.

Lost amidst the military preparations, three other newcomers were unnoticed. That suited the three just fine, they preferred not to be noticed. They were very experienced in not being noticed. After all, the magical community of Britain had avoided Muggle notice since the time of Merlin.

The three Hit Wizards were a part of a string of wizards monitoring the wards placed around England, Scotland and Wales. These wards prevented anyone from Apparating or Portkeying in or out of the country. Only a Ministry official with the proper magical signature could Apparate in or out of the coastal areas. The wards also warned of anyone using magical means such as brooms or carpets to enter the country. The Ministry of Magic monitored the wards from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. The Hit Wizards monitored the local wards and investigated any signs of Dark Army activity along the coast.

Oliver Holmes shivered in the cold spring drizzle on his broom. The young Hit Wizard was midsized with brown hair cut to resemble the military haircuts so common amongst the Muggles. His invisibility cloak contained charms to repel water and to keep him warm but the cold damp seemed to find its way in anyway. The Hit Wizard felt his joints ache in the cold wet. The broom hovered fifty feet above the ground just outside the village. The small cottage they used as a base of operations was directly below him.

“What a lovely evening for flying,” he muttered.

Holmes turned his broom south along the coast to start his patrol. At the start of the war, the patrols seemed an exciting adventure. Magical refugees from the continent arrived on brooms, carpets, and even a few magically propelled boats. The Hit Wizards were kept constantly busy assisting the refugees while ensuring none of them were Dark Army Soldiers. It had been an exciting time. Scary and nerve wrecking, but an exciting time never the less.

The months of patrols wore away the excitement and anticipation of the assignment. Facing a resource shortage, the Ministry could only afford to place three wizard teams along most of the coast. Only in the southeast of England, around Dover and Folkestone did they place larger teams. As the narrowest part of the Channel, it seemed to make sense to increase the defenses there.

For the three man units, the months of tedium became wearing. Each wizard spent eight hours monitoring his local section of the wards. Then they spent eight hours ‘on-call’ to investigate any possible breaches. At least four of those hours were spent flying a broom to look for any signs of Grindelwald’s forces. The other eight hours could be used for personal time, minor things like sleeping and eating.

Months of sixteen-hour days had taken a toll of the teams. The Ministry of Magic swore to them to send each team a fourth member to give the odd day off as soon as Hogwarts and the Phoenix school released their Seventh year students. While the teams appreciated the extra help, the idea of adding an untrained rookie to their team did not fill most of them with happiness.

Holmes completed Hogwarts five years ago. Then he spent two more years receiving advanced training to become a Hit Wizard. Another year would be required to become a full Auror. Hit Wizards trained to fight Dark Wizards and be the muscle of Magical Law Enforcement. Aurors added legal training and investigation skills to the combat training of the Hit Wizards. In Muggle terms, it was the difference between a common street Bobbie and a Scotland Yard detective. Holmes always wanted to be an Auror. He planned to complete his training after the war, but right now the Ministry needed fighters more than they needed investigators.

The twenty-three year-old wizard flew south through the rain towards Lowestoft. The Muggle airplanes were silent tonight. The pilots on both sides of the conflict rested in their bunks tonight. The moonless night was dark as all of the Muggle dwellings along the coast complied with the blackout ordinances of the Muggle Ministry. The low hanging clouds and blackout regulations left the night incredibly dark. As a London-bred wizard, Oliver had never seen a night as dark as this until being assigned to Hopton. Holmes mentally thanked the Department of Mysteries for the new flying goggles they provided to the Hit Wizards. They gathered the little light and magically amplified it so he could see. One could only see a couple hundred meters, but it was better than nothing was. The poor light conditions meant the wizard had to fly high enough to avoid trees and church steeples, but with the night so dark, the cloak was almost redundant.

Holmes was running twenty minutes late on his scheduled run. His fellow Hit Wizard Jonathon O'Neill burnt their evening meal and Holmes waited until fresh food was cooked. Now he was trying to catch up so he could get to sleep on time. Cruising a hundred feet off the ground, Oliver started his patrol.

Five miles south of Hopton, he caught something on the edge of his vision that stopped his heart. Crossing just within his field of vision a large number of flyers had just crossed into England from the Channel. The wizards were flying twenty feet off the ground in a loose grouping. Holmes was high enough that even if they could see through his invisibility cloak the darkness and his height should keep him from being noticed. Holmes altered his course to keep them in his sight.

A quick count and estimation told Holmes there were around eighty Dark Wizards attempting to enter his zone. Remembering his orders, Holmes reached into his robe and grabbed a medallion hanging around his neck. Another gift from the Department of Mysteries, Holmes concentrated on his name, location, direction, and the count of Dark Army wizards. He mentally kept repeating his message until he felt the medallion vibrate in his hand. The Hit Wizard felt relieved with the signal his message was received. His primary duty here was complete.

Hit Wizard Oliver Holmes never lost a family member to Dark Wizards. He never had a neighbor tortured to insanity. Or who simply disappeared into the night. The Holmes were a Pureblood family committed to the Light, but known more for financial dealings than directly fighting the Dark. In fact, prior to completing his Hit Wizard training, Oliver Holmes never knowingly met a Dark Wizard. However, as a child, Oliver idolized the Light champions of the magical world. Holmes grew up loving to read about past fighters and their triumphs over the Dark. Merlin was chief among them but Holmes loved to hear the stories of the lesser wizards and witches who still made a difference.

Oliver was not naïve. As he grew up, he began to understand the details that made his heroes stories a bit greyer. The dirt, pain, and sacrifice of the reality were never truly communicated in those books written for young wizards. He understood most of those he idolized received their recognition posthumously. Even if he were naïve, Hit Wizard training would have driven it out of him.

Oliver never had much exposure to Muggles prior to arriving in Hopton. Although they were unaware of the wizards amongst them, Oliver and his mates managed to occasionally sneak into the local pub for a pint or two. Oliver met a splendid group of chaps that reminded him a great deal of his fellow Hit Wizards. They had the same cocky arrogance as the Hit Wizards. Oliver learned they were all members of the locally based RAF fighter squadrons. Oliver loved to hear them talking about flying and their combat tactics and being pilots, they loved to talk.

Their tales of air combat fascinated Oliver. The one-on-one combat of the fighter pilots reminded Oliver of the stories of the Muggle knights that worked with Merlin to support King Arthur. Rather than noble steeds, the pilots mounted their airplanes, instead of lances, they used machine guns and cannon, but they filled the same role of the knights of Arthur's court. Over the months of growing friendship with the fighter pilots, Oliver decided that if they were knights, then he would be their wizard.

One of the pilots in the squadron was Flight Lieutenant Malcolm Malfoy, a Pureblood squib exiled from his family at an early age. Malfoy was a decent bloke who recognized that a wizard was amongst them. Malfoy spent many hours explaining Muggle inventions and concepts to the Pureblood wizard.

"We could really use a flight of Spitfires about now," Holmes muttered.

Holmes moved his broom up to increase his altitude over the Dark Wizards. He remembered the pilots talking about the importance of two things in a dogfight, the advantage of speed and altitude. Holmes rose up and moved directly above and slightly behind the tail end of the wizards.

Oliver Holmes drew his wand and muttered a brief prayer his pilot-knight friends taught him they used before battle. Then he dove on the Dark Wizards.

The brooms of the early 1940's could reach a top sustained speed of ninety miles an hour. In a steep dive, they could reach about 125 miles an hour. Coming out of the dive directly behind the rearmost flyer, Oliver Holmes started cursing as fast as he could.

The first Reductos arrived as a total surprise to the Dark Wizards. The trailing flyer died before he even knew he was under attack. The Reducto smashed his spine. The next curse only brushed the targeted wizard. However, it did him little good. At ninety miles an hour, falling off your broom is never a good thing.

His superior speed soon carried Holmes in amongst the main group of flyers. Bright lights lit the sky as Holmes continued to fire his curses. Several of the Dark Wizards started to fire back at their

attacker but the darkness and the nearness of their fellows made Holmes a difficult target. Indeed, of the seven Dark Wizards downed in the ensuing dogfight, the Aurors would only be able to verify Holmes downed three additional wizards after his initial two curses. So while Holmes downed five Dark Wizards, the other four were hit by spells cast by other Dark Wizards. Still, with five confirmed 'kills', Holmes became the first recorded wizarding ace in history.

Holmes reached the front of the flight of Dark Wizards. Oliver decided to climb out of the Dark Wizards and circle back. He hoped their night vision was much worse than his was and he could lose them in the darkness. He turned his broom into an almost straight up climb. With a little luck, he would be able to fly out of sight and come around for another run.

Hogwarts

James quickly walked Tom back to the Slytherin dorms. Leaving him at the entrance, James told Tom to go directly to his dorm room and stay put. Tom looked very nervous as he wrapped his arms around the only father he ever knew in a brief hug. A moment later, Tom entered the Slytherin common room and the portal sealed shut behind him.

James slipped into a handy alcove and pulled his shrunken Unspeakable robes from his pocket. He quickly enlarged the robes and pulled them on. Two minutes later The Count was making his way quickly through the school.

As he reached the Entrance Hall, a small squeaky voice called out, "What are you doing here, Count?"

James turned to see Professor Flitwick making his way down the stairs. Before James could reply, another voice interrupted.

"The Count was visiting me to discuss a research project, Filius," Dumbledore said appearing from behind James. James almost cursed him on instinct. He had no idea Albus was in the area.

The Charms professor nodded, "You seem to be in a bit of a hurry."

James looked back at Dumbledore and then at Flitwick. "An alert just came in. Dark Army wizards were just spotted coming in across the Channel near Norwich."

Flitwick looked shocked and then angry while Dumbledore maintained a calm façade.

"I am coming with you!" the future Ravenclaw Head of House insisted.

"I too will be joining you," Dumbledore said in his calm manner.

"I don't have time to argue with you. Summon your brooms. I know the rough area but the report said they were on brooms. We lost contact with the Hit Wizard who spotted them."

The Charms Master cast a single spell that resulted in two brooms appearing almost immediately. Dumbledore caught one as it passed while Flitwick caught one sized perfectly for him.

Noticing James's gaze, Flitwick smiled, "Goblin racing issue. My father gave it to me for receiving my Dueling Mastery. Much faster than the newest Cleansweep."

James just smiled. Even about to fly into a battle, Flitwick was the cheeriest staff member at Hogwarts. "We'll have to race sometime with a side bet." Flitwick showed his goblin side by giving a big grin at the idea of a bet.

"We'll fly to the edge of the school wards then Apparate to the last reported position." At the professors' agreeing nods, James led the way out of the school.

Five miles south of Hopton

The professors and the Unspeakable appeared in a field with a quiet clap. All three had their wands drawn and scanned the area. Flashes in the sky to the west marked the probable location of the battle.

Once the area was confirmed clear, James conjured two pairs of Muggle flying goggles. Then he cast a charm on each and handed it to the professors.

“They are charmed to let you see in the dark,” James explained. “The charm won’t last more than a couple of hours but that should be enough. Don’t look at any bright light source for too long as it could blind you.”

Putting the goggles on, Flitwick exclaimed, “Marvelous! This is wonderful charm work!”

Without another word, the three wizards mounted their brooms. With James in the lead, the three wizards flew towards the battle.

The battlefield presented James with something completely new in his combat experience. Voldemort never really had more than sixty committed, marked Death Eaters. The image of his hordes came from his own terrorist genius and a large number of unmarked sympathizers within the magical community. No Death Eater attack ever numbered more than twenty Death Eaters in one place. Voldemort preferred soft targets and fear to make his point. Even the Final Battle only had fifteen Death Eaters with their werewolf and giant allies. Grindelwald was another animal entirely.

The battle was occurring on the edges of a small Muggle farm. The response team from the Ministry had taken cover in the farmhouse and behind the low stonewalls surrounding the house. James estimated twenty Ministry wizards were occupying the house and its grounds.

Around the farmhouse, James counted about seventy Dark Solders firing curses at the house. The open fields left them exposed but shields and numbers balanced the fight. James counted about eight to ten Dark Wizards taken out of the fight.

Albus turned to James, “What is your plan?”

James hesitated. Something felt... wrong about this. During his time at Hogwarts and during the Horcrux hunt, James learned to listen to his gut. “Professor Flitwick and I are going to hit them on the flank. I want to hit them hard. Professor Dumbledore, I want you to hold back. Wait for an opportunity.”

“Do you suspect a trap?”

"I don't know," James answered faintly. "I can't figure out their tactics. Why stay and fight? They have to know additional reinforcements are on the way. A small force to hold the Ministry here and the rest could be all over England in five minutes. We are just inside the wards here. The boundary is only five miles further inland."

With a final survey of the area, James said, "Let's go, professor"

James and Flitwick stole quietly towards the Dark Solders. The recently tilled field allowed the fresh dirt and drizzling rain to combine to make the field a muddy mess.

When they were twenty yards away, Flitwick removed his goggles and raised his wand to a point over the Dark Army's heads. "*Solis Luminotis!*"

A crack filled the night as a giant sphere of light exploded into existence fifty feet directly over the heads of the Dark Army. A miniature sun complete with light and heat hovered at the Charms Master's call. The mini-sun lit the whole area as if it was mid-day.

James cancelled the charm on his glasses as the night vision charm went into overload. "Nice job, professor. Next time, warn a guy!" he said dryly.

"Whoops!" the professor laughed.

A series of screams filled the air as five of the Dark Army's wizard dropped to the ground with their robes smoking.

"Oh dear," Flitwick commented, "They seem to have included some magical vampires in their forces. This charm perfectly mirrors the light and heat of the sun, on a much smaller scale of course." James had to fight not to stare at his former Charms professor. Flitwick had the same pleased note in his voice Harry used to hear whenever Hermione managed to pick up a new charm on the first try.

Pulling himself from his Flitwick-induced shock, James noticed a couple of the Dark Wizards had noticed their arrival. James pointed his wand at the ground in front of the closest Dark Wizards.

“Eruptus!”

A black and red ball of spell energy shot from his wand to hit the ground in front of the wizards. The ground exploded at their feet, shooting a geyser of rock and mud ten feet in the air. Some of the wizards covered their heads from the debris whilst others tried to magically shield themselves.

Then another explosion occurred directly under the feet of the closest wizard. The explosion threw him into the air, landing under a coating of mud. The concussion of the explosion had at least knocked him unconscious.

A third, fourth and fifth explosion ripped through the Dark Army lines. Although only the second explosion removed a wizard completely from the fight, six wizards lay stunned on the ground at the explosions cut a straight line. Each explosion occurred four feet apart and left a round hole in the ground behind it.

“What was that?” Flitwick asked.

“It is a spell for making post holes to put in a fence. I just overpowered it a bit,” James answered.

Flitwick looked like he wanted to dance. “What an excellent, creative use of an everyday charm! Five points for Gryffindor!”

James wanted to ask the professor why the points were assigned to Gryffindor, but a minor matter caught his attention. The approximately half of the sixty-odd remaining Dark Wizards turned and started to throw curses and hexes at James and Flitwick

Over the next ten minutes, James was again shocked by his former Charms professor’s dueling defenses. The wizard used his small body to his advantage. As a small target, he was already a bit harder to hit. However, the tiny Dueling Master showed how he won that title. His small form never seemed to sit still. Flitwick rolled, spun and jumped out of the way of all kinds of spells. Very rarely did he even bother with a shield.

While James was impressed by Flitwick's defenses, the professor's offense reflected the carefully judged dueling environment he was trained for. None of the spells had the potential to cause lasting physical harm. (Except the min-sun for the vampires and that was more an accident than anything.) Flitwick's choices of spells were designed to reduce his opponent's shields and render them unable to continue to fight.

James took a different tact.

James dodged the first of the Dark Army curses while he drew the Voldemort wand. With a wand in each hand, James did something that appeared completely suicidal the watching Ministry wizards. He started to approach the Dark Wizards.

The green light of the Killing Curse signaled the series of spells cast by the Dark Wizards. With the Voldemort wand, James responded by conjuring a series of lead plates. The plates appeared directly in front of the path of each of the curses. The Dark Wizards were shocked to see the lead absorb their spells before dropping to the ground.

Before the plates had reached the ground, James started to retaliate. A silently cast Cutting Curse sliced into the Dark ranks. Then James cast a spell developed by a Muggle-born wizard during the war with Voldemort.

He quietly said, "*Lux lucis!*"

A focused, almost invisible beam of light shot out of the end of the wand. It only lasted for a split second but it left a lasting impression. The beam passed through three different Dark Wizards leaving a cauterized hole the same diameter as James's wand.

With the sudden attack by James and Flitwick, combined with the efforts of the Ministry wizards in the farmhouse, the British wizards placed the Dark Army forces on the defensive. About a third of the Dark Wizards were now down, dead, wounded, or magically incapacitated.

Then the tide turned again.

James saw it coming for just an instant before it hit. By instinct, he conjured another lead plate. However, this plate was as tall as he was and several inches thick. The instinct saved his life as well as Professor Flitwick.

A stream of Hellfire smashed into the shield. The lead turned red as it absorbed the heat of the spell. The plate absorbed most of the spell, but a concussive blast exploded the plate. James and Flitwick were hurled to the ground. The professor was knocked out instantly while James was left in a haze.

The smell of brimstone filled the air as James fought to pull himself together. All of the other spell casting had stopped with the sudden appearance of the Hellfire. James attempted to get up. The sound of someone approaching caused him to look up.

A cultured, urban voice greeted him. "Good morning. You must be the famous Count I have heard so much about. It is a terrible pleasure to finally get to see you in person. I can see why Christina is so taken with you."

James saw a medium sized wizard approaching him. His first impression was this man should be at a Muggle university teaching philosophy. He just had the academic, Ravenclaw look. Then James noticed the slightly smoking rod in the wizard's hand.

"Grindelwald, I presume? And where is your favorite psycho witch?"

The Dark Lord smiled, "Ah, she was too busy to join us tonight. I had another task for her. I must say, watching you and your little partner here tonight was a treat. You are very skilled."

"Gee, do I get an O, professor?" James asked dryly.

During the conversation, James tried to figure out his best course of action. The blast caused him to lose both of his wands. He could see them and could wandlessly summon them, but not before Grindelwald could fry him with another burst of Hellfire. To make matters worse, James could feel his leg was broken just below the knee. There was no way he could properly dodge an experienced wizard with a broken leg.

Grindelwald laughed gently at James's mocking question. He wandlessly summoned both of James's wands and Flitwick's wand also. "I would bring you as a gift to Christina, but I fear you would find some way of causing me trouble. I am sorry, but a dead enemy is so much simpler to deal with."

The Dark Lord raised his rod. The rod started to glow red as Grindelwald summoned Hellfire.

Five seconds later, James watched history repeat itself. On the other hand, was it prequel itself? (This time travel thing gave him a headache.)

A blast of force smashed the glowing rod from Grindelwald's grasp. "Hello, old friend."

The genial expression on the Dark Lord's face when talking to James disappeared. Grindelwald turned and said in a cold, menacing voice, "Hello, Albus. I should have known you would be skulking about somewhere. What made you crawl out from under your rock?"

"Albert, why did you have to follow this path? The demons will swallow your soul. Please stop this."

The Dark Lord scoffed, "Same old Albus, you think you can talk and manipulate people into doing anything you want."

The Transfiguration Master sighed. "Albert, you were my friend. The Dark magic has twisted your soul. You must turn back!"

Grindelwald laughed. "You fool; this path will lead me to untapped sources of knowledge forever beyond your reach! The mysteries of the universe will be mine to know! Now, die!"

The Dark Lord used his rant to cover his wand dropping into his hand from a sheath on his forearm. With a gesture, he sent a black curse slashing towards Dumbledore.

Dumbledore flicked the spell aside with an almost contemptuous twitch of his wand. Then Dumbledore flicked his wand again and an arc of lightning slashed down out of the sky to strike the Dark Lord.

Grindelwald's shield held the lighting from him, but the ground smoked around his feet.

As a Fifth year, Harry watched Dumbledore battle Voldemort in the entry to the Ministry of Magic. What he saw then impressed the young wizard. Now James watched Dumbledore battle another Dark Wizard. Watching Dumbledore at the height of his power battle Grindelwald was a remarkable sight.

Dumbledore was always the only wizard Voldemort truly feared. Even walking into the final battle, Voldemort never really feared Harry. He respected Harry's power but never fear. Now James understood. Dumbledore was at the height of his magical power now. Tom Riddle grew up seeing the most powerful wizard of his age at his peak all through school. Voldemort must have carried that unconscious image of his former professor as he knew him in school.

The battle raged between the two wizards. Wizard neither dodged nor moved whilst they fought. This was an old-fashioned slugging match. Hellfire was met with a stream of something James could only describe as pure light. The stream of Hellfire met the stream of pure light with a searing hiss. The two wizards each willed their streams at their opponent with equal determination. Sweat and exhaustion marked both wizards' faces but neither would surrender.

Without his wand, James channeled his magic into holding a shield over himself and Flitwick. He considered trying to slip a spell in against the Dark Lord, but they were fighting on too high a level. Any outside magical interference could cause a magical explosion. The magical equivalent of a tactical nuclear explosion would be a very bad thing.

James noticed the remains of Grindelwald's forces had pulled back from the farmhouse. They were now gathered on the far end of the tilled field and out of spell range. They were just at the limits of the light from Flitwick's mini-sun but James could see they all had their brooms.

At some unseen signal, Grindelwald gave a gigantic heave to his Hellfire. The sudden surge pushed Dumbledore back and to one knee. With an odd twist of his wand, the Hellfire angled slightly up. The

matching light from Dumbledore followed it up. Once the Dumbledore's beam was pointing over the Dark Lord, he released his Hellfire. The sudden loss of counter pressure caused Dumbledore to pitch forward and stumble.

"Sorry, Albus, I would love to stay and play with you, but I really must be going." The Dark Lord summoned his rod as a young wizard arrived on a flying carpet. It hovered a couple inches off the ground as the Dark Lord calmly stepped aboard. The carpet flew away flanked by the Dark Lord's remaining forces.

Three minutes later, sixty fresh Aurors, Unspeakables and Hit Wizards arrived from the Ministry. After the battle at the farm, Grindelwald's forces returned to the Continent. The fresh Ministry forces pursued them almost to the coast of France, but their lead was just a bit too much.

James dragged himself over to where Albus lay exhausted in the muddy field. After watching Grindelwald fly out of sight, the professor dropped to the ground, his energy spent. James rolled him over and checked for breathing and a pulse. Dumbledore seemed fine, just extremely exhausted.

James felt a small hand on his shoulder. He turned slightly to see Flitwick standing beside him. The small movement caused James to wince in pain from his broken leg.

"I seemed to have missed most of the excitement," the usually cheery professor said quietly. He offered James both of his wands back.

"Grindelwald decided to pay us a visit. He almost got the pair of us in his opening attack," James answered while taking his wands back. James pointed his wand at his leg and quietly cast a battlefield-healing spell on it. The magic caused the leg to set itself and rapidly heal.

"Doesn't that hurt?" asked an observing Flitwick.

As the spell passed, James groaned, "You have no idea." The spell would instantly set and heal the leg. Unfortunately, it also caused you

to feel all of the pain you would feel if it was set and healed the Muggle way only all at once.

“I thought that was a Dark spell.”

James gingerly stood up to test his newly healed leg. “No, only controlled. It would be very easy to misuse.”

Flitwick nodded. James could see him filing the information away in his brilliant brain.

The Charms Master levitated the unconscious Dumbledore out of the mud. “Let’s take Professor Dumbledore over to the farm house. I don’t think this cold and damp would be good for him.

The Ministry wizards in the farmhouse watched them approach. As James and Flitwick crossed into the farmyard with the floating Dumbledore, James paused in shock. Twenty wizards had been manning the house when James arrived on the scene. Now James saw ten wizards and witches still alert and moving around. Five were unconscious from their wounds. Fifteen additional witches and wizards lay still on the floor.

James recognized many of the dead. Most were fresh recruits no more than five years out of Hogwarts. Others were refugees from European Ministries that escaped to England. James also recognized Auror Franklin. Franklin had been the Auror in charge of Tom’s case at the orphanage.

James conjured a bed for the unconscious Dumbledore. Flitwick placed him gently onto the bed.

“I am going out to check if any of the Dark Solders are still alive,” James told Flitwick. Flitwick nodded absently as he started doing a full medical scan on his colleague.

James was walking back out to the field when the Ministry reinforcements returned. Auror Moody was one of the Ministry personnel who landed nearby.

“Count,” Moody said in greeting. “The Dark Lord’s forces pulled all the way back to France.”

James frowned and motioned for the Auror to accompany him. “Something about this whole thing is wrong, Moody.”

They approached the first Dark Wizard’s body. Aside from his wand, the wizard did not have any kind of personal items. They moved on to the next body and then the one after that. All of the Dark Soldiers were dead. Some of them were obviously killed by their own retreating forces.

Moody looked grim as they circled the battlefield. Finally, he said what they were both thinking. “This was not an invasion. Either it was a test or a diversion.”

James nodded, “If they had pushed on instead of fighting, they could have Apparated all over England. It would have taken forever to trace them all. They stood and fought while they knew the Ministry would be sending reinforcements. It was a large enough group to demand our attention but not strong enough to be a threat to the Ministry’s quick-reaction forces.” Taking one last look around, James said, “Come on. I want to see if Dumbledore is awake yet. I have some questions for the professor.

Dumbledore had awoken just before James returned with Moody. He was sitting on the bed sipping on a cup of tea. Around him, Healers from St. Mungos worked on the injured before moving them back to the magical hospital.

“Ah, Count! How are you doing tonight?”

“I think I should be asking you that question, professor.”

Dumbledore smiled with a slight twinkle of amusement in his eyes. “Indeed, I suspect Albert and I put on something of a show tonight.”

“I guess you could say that,” James answered dryly. “What did you hit him with? The DoM has been looking for something to counteract Grindelwald’s Hellfire for at least ten years.” Flitwick looked on with an interested expression to hear the answer also.

Dumbledore wandlessly cast a privacy charm. “I have been looking into countering Albert’s magic for considerably longer. I would not be surprised if they found the same answer and discarded it as being too difficult to achieve.”

“What did you use?” Flitwick asked curiously.

Dumbledore smiled gently at them. “The only thing that can counter demonic energy is purity. Where Albert seeks the pure power of evil counter him, I had to seek the pure power of good. To see the good in all men and believe in their redemption.”

Moody’s eyes had grown with Dumbledore’s comments. “Is that why you refuse to even have the Dark Arts demonstrated at Hogwarts for the Defense Against the Dark Arts class?”

Dumbledore smiled, “The Dark Arts damage ones soul. I would not like to see any of my students so damaged.”

James was floored. Was this why Dumbledore never looked into his well-being while growing up with the Dursleys? Was this why he refused to believe Snape was such an evil git until it was too late? The more James thought about it the more true it seemed. However, why was he just hearing about this? Not much was known in Harry’s time on how Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald. Why would this be hidden in the future?

Hogwarts

James, Dumbledore and Flitwick arrived outside the Hogwart’s gates two hours later with barely a sound. The Ministry finally released the three wizards after telling their story to three different groups of senior officials. James finally whispered something in Minister Nott’s ear to get them released before the Hogwarts students woke up.

James turned to the two professors. “Professors, I deeply appreciate your efforts tonight. You helped save a great many lives tonight.”

The diminutive Charms professor nodded excitedly. “We are only lucky that you were visiting with Professor Dumbledore when the alert arrived. Otherwise Grindelwald could have succeeded!”

Dumbledore nodded solemnly, "Indeed, my old friend has grown significantly in his power since our days as students. I fear has moved far down the path of the oldest of Dark magic."

James nodded under his Unspeakable cloak. "He sure caught the Ministry by surprise. Gentlemen, again, I thank you. I must be about my duties." The professors said good night and turned to make their walk up to the school as James Apparated away.

James arrived just inside the Forbidden Forest and assumed his bat form. A short flight later and he was within the castle. Exhausted from the large amount of magic use and his injuries, James changed back to his human form and then to the wolf. In a tired trot, the wolf made its way down to the Slytherin common room.

The common room was empty except for a First year boy asleep on one of the couches. A book across his chest indicated he fell asleep whilst studying. James sniffed the small boy and then made his way to his corner. Snuffles made a slight woof in greeting and returned to his sleep.

James curled up in a position where he could see the common room. Just before he fell asleep, his eyes fell on the young boy and a slight pain crossed his heart. It had been nine years for James since one of the worst days in the life of Harry Potter. The loss of his godfather remained a slight sting but time allowed him to focus on the positive memories. The young boy asleep on the couch looked like he stepped from the collection of Marauder pictures he had received from Remus.

Closing his eyes, James's last conscious thought was how much Orion Black looked like his future son, Sirius Orion Black.

Outside the village of Tunstall, England

Five cloaked figures entered the small cottage outside the village of Tunstall. Any locals observing them entering the cottage would have been surprised. The abandoned cottage's roof had fallen in and the garden was overgrown. No one had lived in the house according to local legend in almost five hundred years. However, no local Muggles

were around to witness the sight and no registered witch or wizard lived within fifty miles according to British Ministry of Magic records.

Magical folk saw the cottage very differently. It was a well-kept summer cabin, a bit dark, but very well maintained in a fashion that screamed money. The fireplace lit at a gesture as the group entered the cottage.

As the group shook the damp off their cloaks, a sixth dark figure walked in from another room. "I trust you had a nice flight?" a man's voice asked in an ironic tone.

One of the figures turned on him with a wand drawn. After a moment, the wand lowered and a woman's voice hissed, "Black, one of these days your sense of humor is going to get you killed."

"Relax, Christina. I just left the Ministry. They have no idea you made it into the country. The fools at the Ministry called in almost all of their area teams to stop the Dark Lord's 'invasion'. Your entry in Galeston was undetected."

Christina returned her wand to its holster. Then she removed her cloak and handed it to a member of her team. The Dark Witch turned back to Black. "How did the attack go?"

Acturus Black settled into a deep, comfortable looking chair. "It sounded most exciting. I was not there of course. As planned, I volunteered to monitor the national wards so the Auror on duty could join in the festivities."

"Casualties?" one of the Dark Wizards asked.

Black frowned slightly, "About 50 percent of the diversionary force was lost."

"That high? We only anticipated 20 percent."

"The damn Count arrived from wherever he has been hiding with some friends. According to the reports, they smashed into our flank like a hammer. We could have lost the whole force if the Dark Lord hadn't arrived."

Christina looked shocked. "We lost half the force even with the Dark Lord's assistance?"

Black shook his hand in a back and forth motion. "We lost most of them before he arrived. He was able to hold them back long enough for our force to retreat as planned."

"Why didn't the Dark Lord kill all of the British Aurors? He is much more powerful than any of them." one wizard asked.

Black told them about the Dark Lord's battle with his old schoolmate, Dumbledore. "Say what you want about that old fool, but Dumbledore is just about the only wizard in England who has the raw power to face the Dark Lord's Hellfire magic. Somehow he was able to hold the Hellfire back."

Christina nodded her silent agreement. She turned to one of the wizards with her and motioned to an empty space on the wall.

The wizard withdrew a small object from a bag. With a gesture of his wand, it grew into a very nice looking wall mirror with a series of jewels surrounding it. He cast a Permanent Sticking charm on the back and placed it against the wall. Once he was done, he backed up and nodded respectfully at Christina.

The witch walked over to the mirror while drawing a small dagger from within her robes. She sliced her palm and watched as the blood welled up. Drawing back her sleeve, Christina placed her bloody palm on the eight largest jewels while muttering under her breath. The blood was absorbed into the mirror. Finished, Christina used her wand to heal her hand.

Christina turned back to the mirror. "My Lord."

After a moment, the mirror answered, "Christina, it is good to see you completed your task."

"Yes, milord. According to Black, the British Ministry is unaware of our arrival. We will start our hunt for Slytherin's Heir in the morning."

The voice from the mirror chuckled, "Excellent. Do not fail me, Christina. Find him. Bring me the Slytherin Heir. I need him alive."

"Yes, milord. As you command"

Hopton

One week after Grindelwald's thrust into England, Oliver Holmes became the first Order of Merlin, First Class winner of the war against Grindelwald.

Posthumously

Holmes's luck had failed when a Cutting Curse sliced across the rear of his broom during his climb. His broom cut in two, Oliver Holmes dropped forty feet to the ground below at a rate of over 95 miles per hour. His body was found broken lying at the foot of an oak tree. It appeared he survived the landing for a short time. His eyes were still open and a small smile was on his face as he starred up at the sky.

After hearing from Hit Wizard O'Neill about the circumstance of Holmes's death, Lt. Malfoy decided to do something about it. Telling his captain that Holmes was RAF Intelligence, Holmes became the first and only wizard honored with his name included on the roles of the fallen among the pilot-knights he befriended.

A/N This chapter is dedicated to Professor Liviu Librescu of Virginia Tech. A professor standing defenseless against a murderer to give his students time to escape to safety is an example of courage and dedication to us all.

Chapter 25 – The Revolutionary Spark

June 7, 1941

The Evans house

Summer holidays started a week ago and Tom Evans was already bored.

Living in a house placed under a Fidelius Charm limited many of the entertainment options of a 14 year old wizard. His school friends were unable to visit due to the heightened security after the Dark Army's attempted invasion. Dad did not want too many people knowing the secret of where the Evans' house stood. Tom grumbled about being held prisoner in his own house when he had not done anything wrong. Dad seemed sympathetic but he did not relent.

Tom completed all of his summer homework in the first four days of his "summer imprisonment". Helping with both sets of twins helped fill the next couple of days, but to a fourteen year old boy, that was not a good way to spend your summer holidays. At least if Dad were home he could practice his dueling and animagus skills, but Dad was out helping the Ministry fight Grindelwald.

The seventh morning of Tom's summer incarceration was spent working on a couple Fifth year potions in his mum's potions lab. Mum kept her lab better stocked than Hogwarts. In Tom's opinion, Mum was much better at potions and teaching than Slughorn ever would be. Sluggy spent too much of his class catering to students he could use as connections to the rich, famous or powerful. Unlike the Hogwarts potions lab, Mum's lab was bright and clean.

While studying for her Healers certificate, Mum visited a couple Muggle hospitals for training on understanding certain non-magical ailments that resisted magical treatments. Sarah Evans fell in love with the clean, sanitary nature of the Muggle labs. With her husband's help, Sarah purchased a great deal of Muggle chemistry equipment and installed it into her potions lab. Now all of her equipment stood in glass cabinets and the potions ingredients resided in neatly labeled jars next to many Muggle chemicals.

One thing Sarah Evans did not appreciate in the Muggle labs was the cold, impersonal feeling that came from the rooms. Mum's lab was painted blue with paintings hanging on the wall at regular intervals. Hanging on one wall was a magical window James bought for her birthday. The window could be made to show the view out side every window in the Evan's house. .Mum even had music playing softly in the background.

Tom set aside the Dreamless Sleep potion he had been working on for it to simmer. It would keep for a bit whilst the potion settled. Opening another book, Tom started to read about the Polyjuice Potion. Tom was deep into the instructions and making notes when his mum called down for lunch.

Absently checking the simmering potion, Tom picked up the book and made his way up the stairs. He was still reading as he walked up the stairs and into the hall. The attack occurred as soon as he cleared the stairs.

"Tommy!!"

Twin voices screamed his name as the Twin Terrors assaulted his legs. Pretending not to notice, Tom continued to walk with a four-year-old wrapped around each leg. The twins giggled with each step.

Katie dropped off first. Michael let go to join his sister on the floor. They looked up at their brother and giggled.

Tom looked down from his book. "What has you two so excited?"

Michael grinned, "Grand mum came to visit."

Standing with his hand on the kitchen door, Tom felt a sense of foreboding. "Grand mum?" he asked.

Katie nodded happily, "Mummie's mummie!"

The language passing through Tom's mind at this point would have caused a sever reprimand from his mother. With a sigh of reservation, Tom continued into the kitchen. The rug rats followed.

“Mummie, we found Tommie!” Katie trumpeted their arrival.

Tom saw his mum sitting at the table with an older witch sitting across from her. She looked a great deal like Mum, but with great frown lines running down her mouth to match the scowl on her face. Tom never met his mother’s mum before. She stayed away from his parents wedding to protest the impurity of James’s blood.

Tia and Ron sat in their baby chairs eating their lunch. The younger twins celebrated their first birthday only two days previous. Ron was happily eating everything on his tray whilst Tia ignored the food to watch everyone in the room.

“Tom,” Sarah Evans said with a welcoming smile, “I would like you to meet my mother, Margret Underhill. Mother, this is my eldest son, Tom.”

Tom managed a polite nod and said, “Hello, ma’am.”

The scowl deepened. “So, you are the charity case my daughter took on. You look like a bad one. Bet he gives you a lot of trouble.” The last was said in an aside to her daughter.

Sarah clucked her tongue, “Mother, stop it. Tom is an excellent son. He is very well-behaved and the top student in his year at Hogwarts.”

“What House are you in boy?”

Tom bit his tongue and simply replied, “Slytherin, madam”

“Slytherin! I knew that school had gone down hill. If even Slytherin is accepting half-bloods then things are even worse then I thought!”

“Mother, stop it.” Sarah said in a low but firm tone. “I invited you here to see your grandchildren, not to hear your political opinions.” Sarah turned to her children, “Please sit down so Cillie can serve us lunch.”

Tom gave in to the pleading look in his mum’s eyes to not create an incident. He quietly sat at the table as far as possible from Margret Underhill. Madam Underhill proceeded to ignore Tom and make a

great fuss over both sets of twins. Cillie served her usual excellent lunch that Tom ate in silence.

It was obvious to Tom this was not Margret Underhill's first visit to the Evan's house. Katie and Michael were obviously well acquainted with her while Ron and Tia seemed comfortable around her. Tom wondered why his father allowed her to know where they lived but Tom couldn't have Nott or one of his other friends visit.

Margret Underhill proved incapable of reigning in her opinions. Within fifteen minutes of lunch starting, Madam Underhill resumed on her blood purity comments. Little things at first but each comment was louder and harsher than the one before it.

Tom snorted to himself. 'Voldemort would have an instant follower in this one.'

Madam Underhill heard his snort and stopped herself in mid-rant. She turned and glared at the young wizard. "Did you have something to say, boy?"

"Did you know that for every generation past the fourth a family goes without the infusion of some Muggle blood they increase the chance of a child being a squib by eleven percent?"

Madam Underhill's face turned red in anger. "Rubbish! The purer the blood the stronger the family! Whoever heard of such garbage?!"

Tom shrugged nonchalantly. "We did a research project for History of Magic. Within the first four generations about four percent of the children are Squibs. It seems to level off at ten percent Squibs in a family without Muggle blood for thirteen or more generations. Magical power levels start to drop after about six generations too."

"I have never heard such drivel in my life! That is impossible. Someone made that up and you believed it you naive child!" Tom reflected that beet red was not a good color for Madam Underhill.

Tom shrugged, "Minister Nott was kind enough to give us the information. He seemed to think the information was correct."

The old witch sneered, "Why would the Minister of Magic give someone like you that kind of information? He probably just made it up to have a go at you."

Tom gave her an amused look. "Well, I suspect he gave us good information. I don't think he would give his son and his friends bad information." Tom noticed his mother's eyes reflecting suppressed humor. She gave him a subtle wink.

Madam Underhill looked nonplussed. "You are friends with Minister Nott's son?"

"He's my best mate." Tom seemed to think about something. "Mr. Potter thought our analysis was well done."

Mentioning the Potters gave the witch something else to complain about. "The Potters! Used to be a great family the Potters did. Now look how they have fallen! One of the wizarding world's greatest families reduced to Muggle lovers!"

Michael had not been able to follow much of the conversation, but he did understand the last part. "Grand mum, don't say mean things 'bout Grand mum and Grandpa Potter!"

The witch turned to her oldest grandson and her voice turned sticky sweet, "I am sorry bumpkin, did you say Grand mum and Grandpa Potter?"

Michael nodded solemnly, "Umhmm."

"They are not your grandparents dear. I am your only grand mum still living."

Sarah disagreed, "Mother, I know you are aware the Potters adopted the Evans family into their clan. So Thomas and Elizabeth are very much both my children's grandparents and godparents. Please don't say something like that again."

Margret Underhill scowled at her only child. "The Potters were just looking for a way to pass on the family name. The only other Potter married that Black girl and took off for America."

Tom realized he never wanted to get his mum that angry at him. He could feel the magic rolling off his mother. "Glad I don't have any sensitive potions brewing," he mused quietly.

Katie and Michael looked like they were ready to cry. They loved the Potters. Why was grand mum saying mean things? Tia continued to watch in her quiet way. Ron managed to stop eating feeling the odd tension in his body.

In quiet, determined tones, Sarah said, "The Potters reasons for their actions are between them and my husband. The opinions of your gossip circle do not matter. You have made your opinions very well known my entire life. Now, you are upsetting my children. Please stop making those comments and simply enjoy your time with your grandchildren."

Tom felt like cheering his mother. Instead he turned his head and cocked it curiously to watch Madam Underhill's reaction.

Sarah's mother drew herself upright in her chair. "I will not be spoken to in such a disgraceful manner. That Mudblood husband of yours has given you many wrong ideas." Her voice changed to a resigned sigh. "I suppose I was to lenient on you when you first told me you wanted to get married to such a poor wizard. I should have stood firm then. Very well, Sarah, you will cease this disobedience and impoliteness to me immediately or I shall have you removed from the family."

Tom would have risen to his mother's defense, but he felt a restraining hand on his arm.

Sarah turned from Tom and looked at her mother with a sad expression. "Mother, you may do whatever you feel you must. You always have. James is my husband and the father of my children. Tom is as much my son as Michael or Ron. As for being a 'poor' wizard, James is not that in any form of the word. It is a shame that your own bigotry prevents you from getting to know what a wonderful man he is. Now mother, I think it is best for you to leave now. My children are upset. Please leave."

Madam Underhill looked like a dragon just appeared in her garden. Stunned disbelief filled her face. Slowly she rose from her chair. "Very well. I can see I am not wanted. Sarah Evans, as the acting head of the Underhill family, I must inform you that you are no longer a member of the family. Your branch of the family shall forever more be separated. No benefits, financial or magical will ever be given to you from the Underhill family."

Sarah Evans rose with a look of icy calm. "Madam Underhill, you have said your piece. Please leave my house and never return. I revoke your right of knowledge of this house in my husband's name."

Tom could only watch in stunned disbelief as Madam Underhill turned and walked out of the kitchen. Sarah followed her to the door. Tom followed at a slight distance as the two women walked through the house.

Madam Underhill opened the door and walked out without pausing. As she started walking down the path to leave, Sarah called after her.

"Oh, Madam Underhill!"

Madam Underhill stopped without turning around.

"Since you were only the acting head of the family until my first natural born son came of age, my denouncement means you now have no possible direct heirs. I believe that means my former cousin, Charlie MacTavish now becomes the Head of the Family. Have a nice day!" With that parting shot, Sarah closed the door.

Sarah turned back and looked at Tom. He could see a wet sheen in her eyes. Katie and Michael clung to Tom's legs as the three eldest Evans children stared at their mother.

Sarah calmly looked at the three children. "I am sorry you children had to witness that. I had hoped my mother would set aside her stupid prejudices for the sake of family. Tom, could you please watch your siblings. I have to go to my room for a bit."

Tom could only nod slowly. "Er, sure, mum."

The three children watched as their mother walked away to her room. Tom felt foolish. He should do something, but what? What could he do?

Feeling lost, Tom placed his arms around his stunned younger siblings. "Come on. I know where Dad stashed the ice cream. Then we can go play in the garden."

Tom hoped Dad got home soon.

1 July 1941

The Evans House

A light knocking on his door woke Tom up.

"Tom, you awake yet?" James asked through the door.

Tom rolled over in his bed to glare at the clock. It was after eight in the morning but Tom just did not want to get out of bed.

In a groan, Tom answered, "I was asleep."

The door cracked open allowing James to stick his head in the door. Seeing Tom still wrapped in his blankets, he stepped the rest of the way into the room. Snuffles beat his tail on the floor in welcome without actually moving any other part of his body. Nagini lay silently across the top of Tom's bed.

"Tom, I need you to get up. We have something important to take care of."

Tom was tempted to complain but he caught something in his father's manner that stopped him. A focused determination filled his father's face. "Okay, I'll be out in five minutes."

Ten minutes later, Tom and James flew out of the Evans garden under Disillusionment Charms. James did not respond to Tom's questions while in the house. Those questions only grew as Tom recognized their probable destination from their course, Hogwarts.

Tom's suspicions were confirmed when the pair continued through the wards and directly towards the main Hogwart's entrance. Dismounting at the door, James shrank the brooms and placed them in a pocket. Without a word he led Tom into the school.

The halls seemed strangely quiet to Tom as they walked through the school. The lack of students was bad enough, but the school felt completely empty.

"Dad, where is everyone? Shouldn't the Headmaster or Professor Dumbledore felt us cross the wards and met us?"

James did not turn as he continued to walk purposely through the silent halls. "Most of the staff is on holiday. Professors Dippet and Dumbledore are in a secure conference room at the Ministry. It blocks all magic in or out."

Tom was stunned. "We're the only ones in the entire school?"

Approaching a door on the second floor, James stepped up to it and turned to his son. "I had to manipulate a few schedules to achieve this opening." James opened the door and led Tom into the Girls loo.

"Dad, are we doing what I think?"

James shot his son a grin. "I've never been one for following the rules. Too much Gryffindor Golden Boy in me. The Ministry wanted to have you open the Chamber of Secrets and let them in." James walked open to one of the sinks. He pointed and said, "Tell it to open."

Tom walked over and said, *Open!* Tom watched in amazement as the sink fell away revealing a large opening on the floor.

James handed Tom his broom and asked, "Remember the practice we had last week using our brooms to slowly descend? Now you find out why." Without another word, James dropped into the hole, mounting the broom as he fell.

Tom waited ten seconds and then followed his father.

The hole seemed to be some sort of tube. Water from the sinks or another source must have leaked down over the centuries. The sides of the tube were coated in a thick green slime. At the controlled descent rate, Tom noticed regular, stair-shaped cracks where patches of the slime did not seem so thick.

'I guess Grandpa Salazar did make an easier way to go up and down,' Tom thought.

An opening in the tube appeared just above a bend in the pipe. His father hovered on his broom looking towards the opening.

"What is it, Dad?"

James grimaced and looked at his son. "Your great-whatever-grandfather has an atrocious sense of humor. When I came down here in my Second year, we dropped down the tube. We ended up in a rough cave area filled with old basilisk skins. Did you notice the evidence of the stairs? I wonder if the area below was a feeding area."

Tom laughed quietly. "You really were a Gryffindor. Dropping into a hole with no idea what was at the bottom? You were crazy, Dad."

James gave Tom a sly smile. "I've always been good about leaping before I look. That's how I ended up living fifty years before I was born and stuck with this whiny little kid."

The wicked humor in James's eye made Tom laugh but he had to acknowledge the truth of his father's observation. "So which way do we go?"

"Let's try the main door here. Try telling it to open again."

Tom hissed, *Open!*

The door swung obediently open. A stale, musty puff of air came from the area beyond. James and Tom landed just inside the door. They dismounted and leaned their brooms against the wall.

“Wands out you reckon?” Tom asked. Tom watched his father go white at the question. “Dad, what’s wrong?”

James shook his head. “Never mind. Yes, take out your wand.” He landed inside the opening and took several steps inside. A barely heard Lumos lit James’s wand as he moved in.

Tom followed him into the opening. Once past the door it was a rather wide corridor done in much the same fashion of the dungeon areas of the castle above. The stone walls were dressed neatly and no dampness or mold covered the walls. The tattered remains of tapestries hung down. Even without touching them, Tom could see they were dry and brittle with age.

Tom noticed torches sitting in sconces hanging on the wall. *Light* The torches sprang to life revealing a much longer hall than Tom expected. It continued another fifty yards further.

When he noticed his father looking at him, Tom shrugged, “At least Salazar kept the commands simple. Why didn’t you ask his painting about getting into the Chamber and what was in it.?”

James frowned slightly but Tom could see his lips attempt to smile. “He told me that would ruin the fun. I think he was looking forward to us sliding down the opening. He also hinted that there maybe some traps. So, if you see a gold statue sitting on a pedestal, don’t pick it up.”

Tom just looked at his father with a confused expression. What had that meant?

At the end of the hall stood another thick oak door. The handle seemed to be a simple latch made out of brass.

“I’ve seen doors like this in some parts of the castle,” Tom said. “They all disappeared when then expanded the school for all the new students.”

James nodded absently, “This is probably an original door from when the school was built.” James reached out to tentatively try the door.

The latch resisted but then gave in a sudden jolt. With a loud groan, the door swung open.

Stepping into the room beyond, Tom could only stop and stare in wonder.

The room was about three times the size of the Headmaster's office. The ceiling stretched up about fourteen feet above their heads. A large stone fireplace filled the wall directly across from their door. Two more doors stood on wall immediately on either side of the fireplace. Massive bookcases filled the two walls running between Tom and James and the fireplace. The shelves were filled with a large number of books and scrolls. In the center of the room stood a large desk. It was of massive proportions. An almost throne-like chair stood next to the desk.

"Tom, look up," James whispered.

Tom looked up and felt his jaw drop. The ceiling had the same charm at the one in the Great Hall. The bright Scottish summer sky filled the ceiling. The morning was almost cloudless. Tom assumed the ceiling was simply blue at his first glance.

"It's exactly like the one in the Great Hall," Tom murmured.

The ceiling suddenly changed. Now instead of looking 'up' from atop the Great Hall, it now looked down to show the Hall below.

James started to laugh. "That sly old bastard. He could watch everything happening in the Great Hall from the comfort of his own little hidey-hole. I wonder what else it shows."

Tom called out, "Slytherin common room" The ceiling changed to show the common room. "That looks like the common room if you stood on the fireplace."

"Isn't the painting over the fireplace a static portrait of Salazar? Try the Gryffindor common room."

Tom tried but got no response. Over the next fifteen minutes the two wizards amused themselves by calling out a variety of locations

around Hogwarts. They soon learned the Slytherin and general school areas were visible including the classrooms. The other Houses and individual dorm rooms were not visible except Tom's dorm room. The second floor girls' bathroom was also visible but only in the area near the entrance to the Chamber.

While watching the ceiling, Tom wandered over to the desk chair and dropped into the seat. Tom felt a magical force probing in his mind. "Dad..." he started to say.

Before he could say anything else, a ghostly image appeared in from on him. James, turning to hear what Tom wanted to say, spotted the image at the same time Tom did.

The image did not look too much like an older version of the wizard they met in the Potter's painting. This Salazar Slytherin had been twisted by his pursuit of the Dark Arts. He had the same almost simian appearance as the statue James remembered from his Second year. Then the image started to hiss.

Greetings, my heir. I leave this message in the eve of my final departure from this school. My ceiling has revealed to me that on the morrow my old friend Godric will confront me with those two crones in support. I am more powerful then any of them but not all of them collectively.

I will leave this school to continue my work. Prophecy given years ago told me if I were ever to leave the school under protest, I would never cross its boundaries again. So I leave it to you, my Heir, to finish my work in this school. The influence of the Muggleborns must be removed from the wizarding world! They will corrupt us with their weak minded ways!

I leave you two gifts, my Heir. The first is this place. It contains the greatest collection of magical knowledge ever gathered in one place. Through one of these doors you will find a potions lab and workshop. Through the other you will find my second gift.

I recently acquired an infant basilisk, the true king of the snake realm. Before I leave tonight, I will place the basilisk under a stasis spell. The basilisk will sleep until you come for it. Magic will feed it and

greatly slow its aging. Once released from the spell, it cannot be placed under it again. A summoning spell will call animals of the forest to a grand chamber underneath these rooms. There under my statue the basilisk shall feed and wait until you call on him.

You will find my notes on the basilisk contained in scrolls here in my study. My journals are also here. Only you will be able to read them but guard them well. They contain vast amounts of secret knowledge known only to me.

Use my gifts well, my Heir.

With its final admonishment, the image faded away.

Tom continued to stare at the place the image had stood for several seconds after it was gone. Would the Slytherin family curse cause him to become twisted like that? What had the other Tom Riddle felt when he watched that image? Did the additional time the other Tom spent in the orphanage and without a family make him more susceptible to the curse or did that evil lurk within his soul too?

A hand on his shoulder startled Tom out of his thoughts. "Nothing is written in stone, Tom. Just being here together proves that. The future is yours to mold. Consider this and what I told you about the Voldemort of my past to be a warning."

Tom nodded. He knew his father was right. Intellectually he knew that. Emotionally, he wasn't so sure. If the curse twisted him, he would be responsible for hundreds, if not thousands, of deaths. Tom had heard Dad talking to Mum about how many more students attended Hogwarts, even before the war, then when he attended. All those deaths weighed heavily on Tom at the moment.

Tom felt himself turned to face his father. "Tom, look me in the eye." Tom struggled to look up. "You have a gift, if you chose to look at it right. You know what your future could have held, the decisions you would have made. You are not the same person as Tom Marvolo Riddle! You are Tom Evans."

Tom blinked at the firm conviction in his father's voice. If his father had any doubts, Tom could not detect it.

Taking a deep breath, Tom said, "Thanks, Dad. It just kind of hit me."

James grinned, "I think I can relate a bit. Come on, let's keep looking around."

Grateful for the diversion, Tom joined in looking around Slytherin's study. Many of the old texts were in surprisingly good shape for sitting for a thousand years.

"I think Slytherin placed a type of stasis charm on this entire room," James commented. "Not only are the books and furniture still in good shape, but there is no dust layer on anything."

Five minutes later, Tom called out, "I found Salazar's journals. He wrote them in Parselmouth. This one was written at eleven years old. From the opening it sounds like he started writing it when he was apprenticed to learn magic."

James wandered over in curiosity. "That would be an interesting read. He probably gives a first hand account of the founding of Hogwarts. James picked up another volume and started to page carefully through it.

Tom looked up questioningly when James snorted. Seeing Tom's look James said, "I just found a passage where Salazar is complaining about his roommate, Godric Gryffindork. I guess the Slytherins have been using that particular appellation for a very long time."

"Dad, can we take some of these for me to read over the summer?"

"We can take a couple. We can always come back for more if we need to. Let's check out the rest of the place before we get too involved with the books."

Tom set the first five volumes of the journal on the desk and followed James over to one of the two closed doors. Beyond the door stood Slytherin's personal potions lab and what he called his work room.

The potions lab contained a great deal of old fashioned potions equipment. While many of the cauldrons could still be used, much of

the other equipment would be better as museum pieces. Tom looked at the old knives and other implements lay in neat racks or holders. In some cases he recognized the use of the piece but some of them left him wondering.

“The potions ingredients didn’t hold up too well.”

Tom walked over to join his Dad. James pointed a couple of the jars out. “The stasis spell kept some things preserved, but any thing you really need fresh I wouldn’t trust.”

“I doubt he expected the stasis to have to last this long,” Tom commented.

They moved into the workroom and received a surprise.

“Did you know Salazar made wands?” Tom asked.

James shook his head, the shock evident on his face.

The workroom contained all of the items required for woodworking from a thousand years in the past. Several wands in various states of completion sat on cushioned shelves. Tom noticed two staves in half finished states leaning in the corner.

A rather large pedal-driven saw took up much of the floor space. Tom was surprised to notice all of the tools were of Muggle origin; none of them were magical in any degree. When he asked about it, James shrugged.

“I was never too interesting in making wands. I think I remember something about magical balances and auras involved in the making being important. Maybe using magical tools throws off the auras?”

Tom walked slowly around the room. He noticed a shelf with a dozen labeled jars. Among them he saw ‘Unicorn Hair’, ‘Veela Hair’, ‘Dragon Heartstring’, and ‘Basilisk Fang’. On another shelf several pieces of wood sat with the bark still attached. They looked like branches or the trunks of young trees that had been selected for the wand making process. A small desk sat in the corner of the room. A small bookrack with several books sat atop the desk. Tom glanced at them. He was

unsurprised to see they all dealt with advanced wand making theory or woodworking.

“I wonder if Ollivander would now anything about this,” James mused during his own explorations. “His family has been involved in wand making for so long they may have family records of dealings with Salazar.”

Tom scoffed, “You’re assuming that Ollivander himself isn’t the same one from the Founders’ Time. The man is scary.”

“You might have a point there,” James laughed.

After several more minutes looking through the shop, the two wizards wandered back out to the study and to the remaining door.

James conjured a mirror and slowly opened the door. He cautiously slid the mirror into the room.

“Do you think Salazar would set the basilisk up to petrify his heir?” Tom asked.

“I don’t want to take the chance. You haven’t seen the size of this thing.”

Not seeing the basilisk on the other side, James opened the door the rest of the way. The room seemed to be a small medieval kitchen. A small cooking fireplace stood against the wall with a stone ice box in the opposite corner. Another door stood open leading out of the room. Through the door they could see a much larger room with rough dressed stone. James walked to the open door for a better look.

Before his dad got very far, Tom noticed something. He called out, “I found the basilisk, Dad.”

Lying in a large box slept the basilisk. Tom judged the serpent to be about nine feet long. It was surprisingly thick for a snake of its length. A blue shimmer seemed to surround the basilisk. Tom assumed it was the stasis spell the Salazar-image mentioned.

"I think you exaggerated your stories, Dad," Tom said in a cheeky voice.

"Brat. They must grow a lot in fifty years. It does have the same markings as the one I fought." James leaned over to examine the stasis spell on the basilisk.

"Should we wake it?" Tom asked in a hopeful voice.

"Nagini and Snuffles aren't enough for you?" James asked in a teasing voice. "Let's leave the basilisk to sleep, at least for now. I want to read Salazar's notes before we wake it."

Tom gave an aggravated sigh. "But it could tell us so much!"

"Tom," James said in a firm voice, "we are not going to wake the basilisk until we have more information." James stood and backed away from the sleeping snake. "Come here, I want to show you something."

James led the way out of the kitchen and into the large cave beyond. The cave was huge. Tom guessed it was eighty feet long and fifty feet wide with thirty foot ceilings. Sealed round tunnels led out of the room. One of the tunnels sloped down for a bit before ending at an odd stone closure. James led Tom over to the downward sloping tunnel.

"When I fought the basilisk, I had to play hide-n-seek with it after Fawkes blinded it. It chased me through a bunch a pipe-like tunnels. We never made it to this room, but I am sure that is where the sealed tunnels lead."

"Then what is this?" Tom asked as he gestured at the odd opening they were approaching.

"This is opening to the chamber where I killed that basilisk's future self," James answered. James hissed quietly at the opening. Tom, in his surprise did not catch what he said, but he watched in fascination as the opening was revealed.

James stepped to the ledge and looked down. "This is where the basilisk emerged from. We're standing in the mouth of Salazar's statue. The chamber is a ritual room used for Dark Magics."

Tom walked over and looked down. The large chamber below had columns carved with snakes. A motif covered the ceiling showing a giant basilisk wrapped around the Hogwarts castle. The floor had sand and dirt covering it in places. Tom noticed a moat stood at the base of the statue.

"I found Ginny passed out on the floor right there. Voldemort's sixteen-year-old self was standing over there as he waited for the magical transference to complete. If I had been five or ten minutes later, she would have died." James's voice trailed off and he stood looking out over the Chamber of Secrets.

Tom could only try to image as he listened to his father's flat, emotionless voice. Usually his father's voice reflected the emotion of the story he told. Now it was flat. Tom suspected his father was mentally reliving the event. He noticed an odd stress in his father's eyes. Tom was once again reminded how much this man suffered for and because of him.

Tom put his hand on James's arm. "I'm sorry, Dad. Why don't we head home now? We can read the journals and come explore some more later."

James nodded his agreement and backed away from the ledge. The opening sealed automatically as he backed away.

The two wizards retraced their steps back to the study. They paused long enough to pick up the journals they had selected. James added a notebook simply titled 'Chamber of Secrets' while Tom found one on basilisks. James shrunk the books down and placed them in his pocket.

They picked up their brooms and mounted. With a hissed command, the torches were extinguished and the door closed behind them. Then the two wizards flew back out of the tunnel and made their way back to Hogsmeade.

12 August 1941

The Evans House

The two boys ran into the room, shutting the door behind them. The larger boy dropped into a chair while the other jumped onto the bed.

"I am glad your parents let you out of the house finally," Tom said from the bed.

Nott rolled his eyes, "Dad is convinced the Dark Lord is going to make another effort to grab me. He has Aurors guarding our house all the time. I couldn't even go out to play Quidditch!"

"My dad has our house under a Fidelius Charm. I can go out as long as I stay on the property. So at least I could fly a bit."

Nott lounged back in his chair. "So what was so important you needed to push the parents to let me come over?"

Tom stood up and walked over to a small chest next to his desk. "Look at this."

Nott stood up to look into the box. "What are they? I can't read the writing on the covers?"

"They're Salazar Slytherin's journals. My father and I recovered them last month."

Nott's jaw dropped as he gazed at them in awe. "Slytherin's journals! Can I read them?"

"They are written in Parseltongue. I translated parts of a few of them." Tom picked up a scroll from his desk. "Here is one of them."

Nott took the scroll and started to read it in stunned amazement.

"Nott, you know how we are taught Slytherin only wanted ambitious Purebloods for students?"

Nott tore his eyes from the scroll. "Yah, why?"

“According to the Journals, the Pureblood part wasn’t added until after he was Cursed. He wanted students of subtlety and cunning. Wizards and witches that wanted to be the best. Our House has been lied to and twisted to match the vision of a wizard twisted by magical accident.”

Nott looked even more stunned then before. He also knew his best mate. “What are you planning on doing?”

“Let’s face it, Slytherins run the Ministry. The others are there as well but our House tends to get the politicians. It is our nature. But that nature has been corrupted by trying to live up to the ideals of a man with spell damage! I want to reset our House to how Salazar Slytherin originally intended.”

“You’re talking about setting off a revolution within our House!” Nott whispered in shock.

Tom grinned, “You know the only thing a Slytherin loves more than a subtle plot is a revolution to overthrow those in power.”

“Do you know how many people this is going to stir up? Almost all of the old Pureblood families in positions of power are Slytherin. They aren’t going to like hearing the traditions they have followed for the last thousand years is wrong!”

Tom raised an eyebrow. “Not even from the only living descendent of their House founder?”

Nott paused to consider that point. “You are going to come out?”

Now it was Tom’s turn to pause. “Not publicly at first. Not until after the war. But in our House at school, yes. If we can get a solid base in the current students before the alumni hear about it we have a much better chance of success.”

“You’ve put some thought into this,” Nott observed. “How did you want to start?”

"I think the girls in our year is an easy first start. Then I want to start with the younger half of the House. They are not as tied to the old ways. Then we can start on the older years."

"Sounds like a plan." Nott grinned, "So, where do I sign up? What do we call ourselves?"

Tom felt gratified by his mate's instant acceptance. "I was thinking of calling ourselves 'The True Slytherins'."

Nott considered the name and smiled, "This is going to be fun."

31 August 1941

Grimmauld Place

"Have you packed your things for Hogwarts?"

The young boy address rose from his seat and stood respectfully in front of the man who addressed him. "Almost, father. I still have a few things to pack."

"Go do so now. Stay in your room until I have one of the elves summon you to dinner."

The small boy nodded his head respectfully. "Yes, father."

Within five minutes of the boy leaving, three cloaked figures apparated into the room. The owner of the house did not seem surprised to see them.

"Good afternoon, Christina."

One of the three cloaked figures removed her hood to reveal the Grindelwald's favorite Dark Witch. "Black. Have you learned anything yet?"

The man behind the desk dropped a file on the desk. "The Ministry records Tom Marvolo Riddle born 31 July 1930. Contrary to what Morfin claimed, the mother lived until he was four. She died when she

stepped in front of a Muggle lorry. Then he went into the Phoenix orphanage. I haven't been able to get into their records yet."

The Dark Witch listened while paging through the documents in the file. "This means he would be starting school this year. Why did Morfin have his age so wrong? Didn't Morfin say he came with his adopted father?"

Acturus Black shrugged, "If he was adopted, the Ministry doesn't have a record of it. As for his age... I expect his time in Azkaban added what wits Morfin may have had."

Christina grunted noncommittally at Acturus's suggestion.

"Have you established firm cover identities?" Black asked.

Christina gave him a sardonic smile, "We are out of your little cottage. You may use it again for your little rendezvous. We have spread into three different Muggle towns perfect for our needs. Large enough everyone doesn't know each other, but small enough that there is no significant magical community."

Black glared at the witch, "My father has been in St. Mungos for the last month. He plans to travel to the cottage for his recuperation."

"Of course. Nothing to do with those very interesting pictures Hans found under his bed. Really Black, hiding them under the bed? Aren't you a bit old to believe that hiding place would work?"

Black's face turned a bright red as he suppressed his anger. "Get out of my house. I will send for you when I have more information. I will have my son watch the Hogwarts First years for Tom Riddle. You will have to do the same at the Phoenix school. None of the *better* families have children attending that travesty."

Christina ignored the implied insult of 'sending for her'. This fool's time would come soon enough. Instead she smiled politely, "But of course Mr. Black, we would never want to outstay our welcome. Send word when you have found something...useful."

Without another word, the Dark Witch and her followers were gone.

Acturus Black stood up in his rage and stormed over to his study door. Throwing it open violently he screamed, "ORION, GET DOWN HERE!"

A thud was heard from the upstairs followed by a series of softer bounding coming from the stairs. The same young boy as before came running at his father's bellow.

"Yes, father?"

"After the Sorting tomorrow, you are to write me a letter describing all of the First year boys. Pay particular attention to the Slytherins. Do you understand?"

"Yes, father."

"I will expect an owl before you go to bed tomorrow night. I will expect additional owls at least every other day until I tell you otherwise."

"Yes, father."

"Now, go finish getting ready for school."

"Yes, father."

Chapter 26 – True Slytherins

The Great Hall was decorated in grand style for the start of 1941-42 school year. The banners of the four Hogwarts Houses were joined by those of the visiting students. The large silver candelabras lit the room in a warm glow while the ceiling revealed the fading light on the setting sun.

Tom walked into the Hall with Nott. He paused in the doorway of the Hall to take in the sight. During the summer, Hogwarts took on a special meaning for Tom. Forbidden to leave the Evans property, Tom entertained himself with reading the journals recovered from the Chamber of Secrets. It amused Tom to learn that the famous Hogwarts: A History was no more accurate about the Hogwarts founding than the average Daily Prophet article was today if one believed the journals.

Slytherin's journals covered his life from the start of his apprenticeship until his ejection from Hogwarts. He may have continued them after leaving the school but if so they were never placed into the Chamber of Secrets. Reading the many volumes took Tom most of the remaining summer but they gave Tom a deep appreciation for what the Founders accomplished.

The four Founders were apprenticed to four different wizards in the early 900's. The Muggles were ruled by King Athelstan. Chaos ruled Britain in those days. Only forty years before had native English forces reclaimed London from Dane raiders. Raids by Viking, Dane, Pict or other groups were not uncommon all around the country. The magical community of England lived in carefully protected enclaves around the country. As a rule, the magical communities of Europe agreed not to interfere with the squabbles of the Muggles. The Purebloods felt there was no difference between one Muggle ruler and another. Loyalty was given to the magical community first. Nationalism was a far distant loyalty.

These were in the times before a true magical government existed. The British Ministry of Magic would not be formed until the mid-1600's. A Magical Council made up of enclave elders met to decide issues and decree levels of mastery on witches and wizards. The

magical world was not ruled by law but by traditions, rituals, and courtesies developed over thousands of years. No magical nobility existed in a formal Muggle-style. Rather position was based on age, experience and magical power.

Being accused of witchcraft in the Middle Ages could lead to most unpleasant results. Muggles tended towards the superstitious in these times. Poor crops, odd storms and other occurrences were blamed on witches and warlocks. Most of those accused were simple innocent villagers who seemed different for some reason. Occasionally a Muggle-born witch or wizard who lived too close to the Muggle world would be accused and tried. Because of this chaos, most magicals stayed within their protected enclaves, away from the Muggles.

In one of these London enclaves the future Hogwarts founders were apprenticed to their masters. Salazar and Godrics's masters were brothers and had their apprenticed share a room. The results were spectacular. Spectacularly bad that is. The two boys hated each other at first sight. Salazar grew up in London and lived in magical Rome for a time with his father. He had traveled to Egypt and Mesopotamia to see the ancient magical sites. Godric was the son of a village in the wilds of Wales. Although a Pureblood, Godric was raised alongside his cousins when his aunt married the local Muggle chieftain. Godric enjoyed the typical pursuits of a boy raised in the petty nobility. With their contrary backgrounds, clashes were almost inevitable.

According to his journal, Salazar's fights with Godric continued until they were fourteen. The two young wizards were sent by their masters to gather potions ingredients near Hadrian's Wall. Because the ingredients were too delicate to travel magically the two boys were limited to traveling by horseback. By Salazar's descriptions, the only surprising thing about the trip north was they both survived it! Nasty, vicious pranks were played by both parties from the time they left their masters' sight.

When Tom showed the entries to his father, James snorted and muttered something like "sounds like my father and Snape." Tom wasn't sure what it meant but it seemed to amuse his father.

The journey may have ended the same way it started except for the pair crossing the path of a Viking raiding party sacking a Muggle village. A small hilltop fort overlooking the village burned viciously. Its wooden walls burned under the pitch of the raiders. The two young wizards arrived under Notice-Me-Not charms to witness the rape and pillage of the village.

The scene affected the two young men differently. Salazar saw himself as a cultured, civilized man. The barbarism in front of him angered him. Godric saw the village he was raised. Although many leagues apart, the two places contained a great many similarities. Godric saw his own village being put to the axe in front of him.

With only a glance between them, the two wizards went to work. Careful not to work too openly, the wizards used their magic to bring misfortune on the raiders. Godric caused all of their axe handles to rot. More than one Viking lost body parts to falling axe heads. Salazar banished a small dam causing a small flood to occur in the tributary where the raiders' boats were beached. The raiders were forced to chase after them in fear they would be lost or crash into rocks under the water.

With the Vikings' attentions diverted, the remaining villagers were able to gather their things and flee the village. Through subtle magic, the wizards covered the escape of the villagers.

A defining moment in the history of the magical world occurred when Godric noticed a raider dragging a young girl out of a ruined hut. There was no doubt in Godric's mind about the Vikings intentions. What happened next had nothing to do with the girl being especially pretty. She was a typical girl of her time with bad teeth and a bad diet. Nor was she magical in anyway. None of that mattered though. Godric drew his sword and broke from the cover of his protective spells.

It was not a fair fight. The Viking died without ever truly seeing his attacker. However, his three shipmates did see Godric's arrival. Now the three older and experienced fighters faced one fourteen year-old boy. With the courage (and foolishness) that would later define his House, Godric faced the three men unflinchingly.

While Godric fended off their attack, Salazar became aware of his fellow apprentice's dire straits. Rolling his eyes at the foolish action, Salazar prepared to assist his fellow wizard.

One of the Vikings made the mistake of underestimating Godric. A sword thrust into the man's beefy thigh answered his misjudgment. While delivering his attack, Godric received a slice to his back that would leave a scar for the rest of his life. Then Salazar arrived at Godric's back with his sword drawn. Back to back, the two wizards held their own against the raiders. The fight continued for several minutes before a horn sounded from downstream. The raiders backed off from their opponents, turned and ran off without a second glance.

The two young wizards slumped to the ground in exhaustion. A number of wounds bled on both young men from their fight. Part of their exhaustion came from the physical fight. The rest came from the knowledge that neither expected to survive the fight.

When they recovered, the two wizards made their way back to where their horses were secreted. As they bound their wounds, Salazar started to deliver a scathing attack on Godric's brainpower, sense and probable parentage. Godric just worked quietly without interrupting Salazar's rant. He actually agreed he deserved it. It was a very foolish thing to do to charge in with a sword and not to use magic.

The journey back to London now took on a very different tone. No pranks were played. No malicious arguments filled the air. Although not fast friends, the two young wizards developed an appreciation for one another during the fight. By the end of the journey both had taken the first tentative steps towards forming a friendship.

The journals said how the young wizards' masters were overjoyed with the change in attitude of their charges. Less enthusiastic were two young witches in training living in the same enclave. Rowena and Helga were slightly younger than the two wizards but not far behind them in their studies. With the sudden end of hostilities between the two wizards the boys started to tease the witches in their spare time.

By the time the four ended their apprenticeships, a firm friendship formed between them. Although gifted in different ways, they were celebrated as the four most promising magicals England had seen in many years. The Magical Council made much of the four powerful witches and wizards. With their power and knowledge, many expected them to take seats on the Council before they reached a wizarding middle age.

The four left their enclave to travel in different directions. They followed their studies in pursuit of their masteries in the different magical disciplines. Salazar focused on potions, magical combat, and arthimancy. Godric also studied magical combat but preferred transfiguration and the study of magical creatures. Rowena studied ancient runes, charms, arthimancy and divination. Helga received her masteries in charms, herbology, and potions. Although the four kept in touch via owl, they did not meet again for fifteen years.

Partially by chance but mostly by planning, the four magicals received their masteries from the Council at the same time in 961. A wild celebration was held to honor the four. Salazar never said who broached the idea first, but sometime during the celebration the four got to talking about taking apprentices. This led to a discussion on how to train apprentices in areas of magic that were not their specialty.

One month later a small covered wagon approached a place in the wilds of Scotland. It was a small valley in the Highlands near the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Muggles did not live nearby out of fear of the fantastic monsters living in the Forest. A council member had grown up nearby in a former Roman villa. He remembered the valley from his teenage explorations.

A tent was erected and surveying commenced. The four magicals constructed a room out of native stone by hand over the period of months. Four walls, the floor and a roof were built, but no door led into the room within. Each stone was laid with care and then runes were carved and charms cast. Once the room was completed a ritual of binding tied all of the materials to each other and to the sources of the materials. A door appeared in the wall allowing the four Founders

access. The four Founders entered a room that responded to their every wish.

Inside the room the Founders spent weeks designing their school. Salazar studied Muggle architecture during his travels while Helga had a talent for making the designs practical. Godric and Rowena focused on the defensive measures and wards for their new school. The Design Room allowed the four to imagine different designs and 'walk' through the halls of their proposed school. Weeks were spent deciding all of the details. They made it a place of learning, but also whimsy.

Once the design was complete the Founders activated the true purpose of the room. The four lent all of their magic to their room, dropping into week long magical comas. The magically bound stones, wood and metal of the room called to their brethren to form around it in the design activated within the Design Room. The magical room rose up as a castle formed around it. When the Founders awoke from their comas their school was complete.

For the next forty years, the Founders taught in the school. In the early days they often faced disgruntled witches and wizards upset that many of the best potential apprentices left to attend Hogwarts. Correctly assuming most wanted cheap labor rather than someone to teach, Salazar offered positions teaching at the school. No one took his offer.

The original Design Room remained to allow modifications to be made to the castle. The Founders placed it in an isolated hallway on the seventh floor of the castle. To help hide the Design Room, Godric charmed the room only to appear to one who truly needed something and followed the little ritual. Even the first students did not know of the room and its secret was only passed to the Headmasters and mistresses of the school.

Now the last descendant of Salazar Slytherin walked into the Great Hall the Founders designed. Although he had seen the Hall several times a day for his three previous years at Hogwarts, Tom stopped now to truly appreciate what he was looking at.

"Tom, you okay? You just stopped," Nott asked.

Tom nodded. Then he turned to his best mate and smiled, "I was just thinking about some of my 'studies' over the summer."

"Well, daydream latter. We have to get seated before the Sorting starts or Sluggy will have us in detention."

Tom followed Nott to his accustomed place at the Slytherin table.

The Sorting passed without incident for Tom. The incoming First years were slightly more numerous than the previous year but about 70 percent of them were witches. It seemed a bit odd but similar things had happened before so Tom did not think anything more about it.

Once the Sorting was complete, Professor Dippet rose to give his welcoming speech. As he was talking Mary leaned over and whispered, "Tom, why is your father here?"

Tom just smiled back and winked at her.

At the staff table, Dippet started his speech. "Greetings students. Welcome back to another wonderful year here at Hogwarts." The Headmaster continued in his dry droning style. Most of the students just wanted him to sit down so they could eat. His wrap-up though grabbed many of the students' attention.

At a gesture from the Headmaster, James stood up. "Joining us this year for two to three days a week will be Professor Evans. Professor Evans will be teaching a Magical Dueling class that will be an optional area of study for Third years and higher. Professor Evans has taught dueling skills to Aurors and will also be teaching this course at the Phoenix school."

Tom noticed that Merrythought looked a bit off at this announcement. Tom did not really like the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor but he could see where the new class could be taking over her area. Apparently his father did too.

After the Headmaster's introduction, the new Professor Evans said a few words. "Thank you for your greeting. My class will focus on learning to defend oneself from attack by fellow witches and wizards.

We will work on both formal dueling and magical combat. This class augments your Defense Against the Dark Arts studies. Since we will work on only one area of that curriculum, you will still be required to take that class. Thank you."

As the new professor sat down, Nott leaned over to Tom. "That seemed like an odd speech from your dad."

Tom nodded his head towards Merrythought. "I think Dad was trying to reassure Merrythought he was not after her job."

"Thank you, Professor Evans," Dippet was saying as James sat down. "Due to space considerations, the professor's office will be located in the former location of the second floor girls' bathroom. A new, smaller bathroom may be found down the hall."

Headmaster Dippet continued his speech but Tom was no longer paying attention. Instead he was staring at his dad. James threw him a subtle wink. Tom smirked in return. Well, that answered the problem of sneaking into the girls' loo to get into the Chamber!

2 September 1941

"I didn't know there was a lounge on the seventh floor," Mary commented as Tom led them inside the room. It was very comfortably appointed with a chairs and a couch settled around a fire. Tea and biscuits sat on a table in the middle.

"Professor Evans opened it for us," Nott commented from where he was already seated in the room.

Tom led Mary, Xurana and Laura into the room. Mary and Laura settled onto the couch while Xurana wandered around the room looking at the paintings and furniture.

"I've been up here before," Xurana insisted. "I know this room wasn't here before."

Nott threw her a disbelieving glance. "We go to a school that had three new towers appear over night and you are worried about one new room appearing?"

“Come on, Xurana. Sit down. I want to hear what Tom has to say.”

Xurana didn't glance at Mary's commanding tone, but wandered over to take a seat in a chair anyway.

Once Xurana was seated, Laura smiled at Tom. “What was so important you couldn't talk to us in the common room about? And why aren't Ella, Janek, or Andrea here too?”

“We have to discuss some things about our House. This doesn't involve them,” Tom answered.

“Too bad,” Mary commented with a slightly false note of regret in her voice. Tom resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Mary was a great girl but all of the girls made comments about the others when they were absent. It was like they were fighting for a prize or something. Tom didn't understand it. Nott claimed he didn't either but Tom wasn't sure he believed him.

“I wanted to talk to all of you about some things I learned over the summer. Very important things that we can't tell anyone outside this group yet,” Tom said. He pulled a scroll out of his robe.

“This is a contract to keep anything I tell you secret unless I give you permission. Nott has already signed it. If you don't feel you can sign it I'll understand but I can't tell you anything.”

Laura picked up the scroll. “This is a magically-binding contract?”

Tom nodded, “I figured out how to do it from some notebooks my father had in his library. They belonged to a friend of his while he was in school.”

Laura looked up at Tom. “Is this that important?”

Tom nodded, “I think so.”

“Why?” Xurana asked.

“I can't answer that until after you sign the contract.”

Mary had been looking at Tom with a speculative look. She took the contract from Laura and quickly signed her name. Handing it back she said, "I want to know what has you so stirred up."

Laura signed immediately after while Xurana seemed to be hesitant. "What if we think someone else should be told?"

"You won't be able to," Tom replied. "The magic will prevent you from telling anyone what I tell you here tonight."

"Just sign it, Xurana," Nott said in a bored tone. "Or you can leave."

Xurana threw Nott a disgusted look but signed the contract. Once she was done, she dropped the quill and looked at Tom. "What is so important?"

Tom picked up his tea, sipped it, and put it back down. "Everything we have been taught about our House is wrong." Tom paused to hold up his hands to prevent the girls from interrupting him. "I know this is going to be difficult for you to hear, but please, just listen," he said in a pleading voice.

Tom looked at the girls. "This summer I inherited a set of journals. They were Salazar Slytherin's from his student days until he left Hogwarts. He talked about his dreams and what he wanted from his students. It wasn't until after he was damaged in a magical accident that he came to hate Muggles and the Muggle-born. His illness warped the image people had of his House."

"He wanted students who were mentally flexible. Slytherin wanted people who could look at a problem and come up with unique solutions. This came to us as cunning. He wanted the ambitious students, yes. But by ambitious it originally meant the driven students, not to win-at-all-costs. Let's face it. If you want to be sneaky, don't get put into the House known for openly 'sneaky' people."

The girls sat stunned by Tom's words. Mary sat with her jaw open, looking at Tom in shock. Her face went blank during Tom's comments. Laura smiled at Tom with an excited look on her face. Xurana seemed the most upset at Tom's revelations.

“How can you say that? How do you know those journals are real? What makes you think that you can say that over a thousand years of House traditions are wrong? Our House traditions formed the basis of true wizard society!” With each question, Xurana’s voice grew louder.

Tom leaned back in his chair to observe Xurana. She had always been the most observant and contained of his friends. Her outburst seemed a bit out of character for her.

“The journals are real. I have spent a good part of the summer reviewing them. There is no chance they are forgeries.”

“How can you be sure of that?” she challenged.

Tom gave her a rather cool smile. “Among other things, they were written in Parseltongue. That rather limits who could have written them.”

Xurana gave Tom a small smirk. “So we have to take your word for what they say? How do we know this isn’t a power play by a Half-blood to get more power from the Purebloods?”

“Xurana!” Laura cried out. “How can you say something like that about Tom? He’s been our friend since we got to Hogwarts!”

Tom ignored Laura and glared at Xurana. “I guess you will have to take my word for it, Pureblood. Unless you have another Parselmouth hanging around?”

“Where did you get the journals?” Xurana challenged Tom. “How can you prove their authenticity? Why would you get them?”

Tom was starting to see red crowding his vision as his anger grew. Leaning forward in his chair, Tom almost hissed out, “I am the only living descendant of Salazar Slytherin! I retrieved his journals from the Chamber of Secrets! No one has a better right than me to those journals!”

Mary and Laura looked almost ready to faint at Tom’s angry words. Even as shocking as Tom’s claims about the mistakes of their House, this one put that to shame. Neither could think of any possible way to

react to the news. Not since Slytherin left the school had a known descendant of the Founder attended Hogwarts.

The surprising reaction was Xurana's. Her angry expression abruptly dropped away to be replaced by a small smile. Not a smirk, an honest smile.

"You finally admitted it. I wondered how long it would take."

Her sudden reversal caught Tom by surprise. "What?" he asked as Nott started to laugh.

Xurana's smile became slightly smug. "Really, Tom. I've known since First year. A Parselmouth that is obeyed by all the snake ornaments in the dorm? You have a snake familiar and don't need to use the password to enter the common room. The snake during our House initiation almost bowed to you! Every year it looks for you before beginning the initiation now. It wasn't that hard to figure out."

When Tom heard her comments it was his turn to act stunned. "You knew?" he asked.

"I just needed you to admit it," Xurana confirmed with a grin. "I figured if I got you angry enough you would tell us."

Nott chuckled, "That certainly worked. So much for our 'cunning' Founder's Heir! Hey!"

Nott's chair suddenly flipped back, throwing him onto the floor. A blizzard of pillows dropped out of the ceiling atop the Slytherin Fourth year.

"Tom! You're playing dirty!"

The girls looked at Nott being buried by the blizzard of pillows. Mary muttered, "I'm not going to ask where the pillows came from." Then they turned back and ignored the ambushed Nott to concentrate on Tom.

Laura turned to Xurana, "Why didn't you tell us?"

The pretty Fourth year shrugged. "I knew but I didn't *know*. I didn't want to start a rumor. I figured Tom would tell us sooner or later." She turned a mock glare on Tom, "I expected you to tell us *last year*."

"How long have you known you were Slytherin's Heir?" Mary asked Tom.

Tom shrugged, "It was a couple of years before I came to Hogwarts," he answered vaguely.

"So when we were going through all of the House inductions you already knew? You must have been laughing at the older students trying to impress us," Laura commented with a small smile.

Tom felt relieved they were taking this so well. Much better than he expected. The girls were his friends but all of them were raised in families where one or both parents were Slytherin alumni. Slytherin parents tended to push their House values on their children even more than parents from the other three traditional Hogwarts Houses.

Xurana broke Tom out of his thoughts. "What else did you learn in the journals?"

For the next two hours Tom told the three girls and Nott all about the history recorded in Slytherin's journals. Tom read some of the passages to the group. The Houses did not exist for the first ten years of the school. At first the Houses were informal groupings for the purposes of contests and organizations. The dorms were segregated by age and sex, not House affiliation. It was not until shortly before Slytherin's magical accident that the House structure became formalized.

The five Fourth years discussed their plans for changing the course of their House.

"You do realize we are going to have to keep the Revolution pranks going?" Nott asked.

"I had planned to," Tom answered, "but why do you say we have to keep it going?"

"It'll keep the other Houses distracted. If they are worried about the pranks, no one is going to have time to wonder what is going on in Slytherin."

"Except, Ella, Andrea and Janek," Xurana commented. "They spend a lot of their free time in our common room. I think you should tell them, Tom." She glanced at the other two girls and then back at Tom. "They will realize something is going on."

"I planned to tell them after we discussed it tonight," Tom said. "They are not in our House, but are almost adopted Slytherins." Tom snorted, "I think Ella would give me an earful if we kept this secret."

Nott laughed, "She thinks she is everyone's mother. I start doing my homework before she even walks into the common room now. Too afraid of one of her 'talks'."

Mary gave her friend a smile full of mock sympathy, "Oh, so it's because you are afraid of her and not that you are sweet on her?"

The girls laughed as Nott attempted to protest his innocence. Tom kept his comments to himself. He did notice Nott seemed particularly concerned that Laura accepted he had no romantic interest in the Polish witch. Laura herself just laughed at Nott's protests of innocence, but Tom wasn't sure she hadn't noticed the same thing also.

Mary caught Tom's eye and winked, telling Tom she had the same thoughts he did. Tom laughed quietly at Mary's subtle manipulation of Nott. Tom made a 'tisk-tisk' motion with his fingers to which Mary gave him an innocent smile.

Tom interrupted the laughter with a quiet cough. "We need to get back to our dorm. It is almost curfew. I just wanted to say thank you to each of you. We are going to set Slytherin back onto the course Salazar originally intended. We will show the rest of our House what it means to be a true Slytherin."

"You can be so dramatic sometimes, Tom. You sound like a politician," Mary commented with an innocent smile.

“Oi! No need to get insulting!” Tom growled with a mock pout.

The others laughed at Tom’s expression.

3 September 1941

Professor Evans’s Office

Tom knocked lightly on the door that formerly opened into the second floor girls’ bathroom. A muted comment from the other side was all the invitation Tom needed to open the door.

“Professor Evans, I presume?”

James laughed. “Cheeky brat. Come in and close the door.”

Tom stepped into the room and absently closed the door behind him. The former bathroom looked nothing like it did before. About half the size of the original bathroom, the office looked like it came from a modern (for the 1940’s) Muggle executive office. Well-constructed dark oak bookshelves lined two of the walls. A number of books shared space with numerous wizarding photos and other items. A large round table dominated the center of the room. The table did not have legs, but rather the entire center seemed to be made of solid wood. A large painting of Hogwarts hung on the wall behind Professor Evans’s desk. The desk itself was modest sized but matched the construction and wood of the bookshelves.

James set the book he was on his desk aside and smiled at his eldest son. “And what can I do for you today, Mr. Evans?”

“I just wanted to see what you had done to the place, Professor Evans. It looks a lot like your office at the Phoenix Foundation but smaller.”

“Your mum did it with Mrs. Catchbottom. I came in after the Sorting Ceremony and the room was done.”

“What happened to the Chamber opening?”

James hissed, *Open*

The large round conference table slid to the side to reveal the opening to the Chamber of Secrets.

Tom glanced down the tunnel. "Did you clean it? The sides look scrubbed."

"The house elves did it last night. Apparently they know where the Chamber is but can only access it with the permission of a Parselmouth who knows where it is. I called an elf here to ask if they could clean it. I hadn't seen an elf that excited since Dobby. Next thing I know there was a swarm of elves working on the tunnel and the whole Chamber. I guess having an area of the school they couldn't clean drove them spare. It was like Christmas morning for them."

Tom laughed at the image his father's words conjured up for him. It would have been fun to watch the elves working on the centuries old layers of dust, cobwebs and slime.

"Watch this," James said with a smile. *Stairs*

Tom watched as the cracks he noticed on his broom trip down the tunnel widened to reveal circular stairs spiraling down the tunnel. The activation of the stairs also caused magical torches in small recessed niches to ignite.

"Neat," was Tom's only comment.

James smirked. *Slide*

The hissed comment caused the stone stairs to change like the stairs to the girls' dorms. The stairs now formed a perfect slide that spiraled down to the basilisk's feeding chamber below. The torches had also extinguished to leave a hapless intruder sliding down into an abyss only to be potentially met with a monster snake.

"Oh, that's evil," Tom said softly. He was impressed at the cunning thinking of his ancestor; although he did remember this was intended to hurt people, not just prank them.

"I have something else to show you."

Tom looked up as James closed the tunnel with a hissed word. The chairs around the table repositioned themselves neatly around the table. In less than five seconds there was no trace a tunnel had ever been opened here.

“Come over to my desk,” James said. James led Tom around the desk to stand behind it. James turned to look at the painting of Hogwarts hanging on the wall.

“I solemnly swear I am up to no good.”

Tom looked up in shock as the painting dissolved into a black canvas. Then writing appeared on the canvas:

The Count and Countess

With Assistance and Inspiration from

Messrs. Prongs, Padfoot, and Moony

Presents

The Marauders’ Map, Mark II

The writing faded as it changed into a map of Hogwarts. Like the original Marauder’s Map, this Map marked the names of everyone in the castle or on the grounds. Each name was trimmed in a color to highlight House affiliation, staff, or visitors.

“That’s wicked!” Tom said in excitement. “You made a new Map!”

“Even better,” James smirked. “Map Locate Albus Dumbledore”

The Map suddenly pulled the Transfiguration classroom with Dumbledore’s attached office and their immediate surrounding environs. Dumbledore’s name was bordered by blue to indicate a professor. Tom noticed the red bordered name of Minerva McGonagall in the classroom with him.

Before Tom could comment, James said, “Map Change Hogsmeade”

Now the Map changed to show the whole village of Hogsmeade. All of the shops and houses appeared on the Map with the dots of the villagers and shoppers moving through the village.

Tom was shocked. "Dad, you did all this?"

James smirked. "I found the book my father and his friends swiped from the Potter library when they made the original Map. Between that, the Map and your mother's help we have the Marauders Map Mark II."

Looking at the Map, Tom asked, "You have everything in the village on the Map?"

"All the buildings, yes. The public buildings, like the Three Broomsticks and the Post Office, have the internal floor plan visible. Private homes it just shows who is in the house. It would have been an invasion of privacy to have the Map show too much "

"How did you do this?"

"Hogwarts wasn't really too difficult to do the basic map. It ties into the school wards and the schools magical connection to what we call the Room of Requirement. Only a Founder's heir could do it. My father could because of his Potter connection directly to both Ravenclaw and Gryffindor. You could do it as the eldest of the Slytherin line. Zebedee Longbottom could also as the current Gryffindor heir. Whoever the senior Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff heirs are now can as well."

"Hogsmeade was more difficult as no ward surrounded the town. When I added some additional wards on our house, the Minister allowed me to place a very light proximity ward on the whole village. The wards 'tastes' each person's magical signature entering their zones. Then the Map can track people as they move through the warded areas. Neat, huh?"

Tom nodded, "Very neat. Can this tell you when one of Grindelwald's people come inside the ward?"

“It only says they are a visitor. The school wards only recognize students, staff and visitor. The Hogsmeade wards are even simpler with just villager and visitor. It will alert me if anyone tries to breach the wards on our house.”

Looking at the Map, Tom muttered, “There goes getting away with any pranks.”

James laughed, “No one else knows about this Map except your mother. My father, Padfoot and Remus would be very upset with me if I used the Map to stop pranks. So, I guess I will just not notice those little things.”

Tom smiled at his father. He was relieved that pranks would go unnoticed but he wondered what it would mean to his plans for Slytherin.

Almost like he could read Tom’s mind, James motioned Tom to a chair and told him to sit. Tom became very concerned over his father’s sudden seriousness as he sat in the indicated chair.

James settled into his chair. “I have some news for you Tom about Grindelwald’s hunt for you.”

Concerns about the Slytherins and his plans for them dropped completely away. “What have you heard?”

“After the ‘invasion’ last spring, we became concerned that it really made no sense. Their force was enough to be taken seriously but not enough to hold any land they took. We started looking for infiltrators.”

James sighed, “Last week we learned someone at the Ministry accessed Tom Marvolo Riddle’s birth records. Unfortunately it seems to be someone with Wizengamot connections and we cannot tell who it was.”

“So they know who I am?” Tom asked in an almost whisper.

James smiled, “Not exactly. My superior in the Department of Mysteries replaced certain key facts about your life. For example, he removed three years off your age. He also did not have you arriving

in the orphanage until you were four. This means Tom Evans falls outside their search parameters.”

Tom breathed a bit easier at the news.

“You will have to be more careful about you use of your Parselmouth abilities. They automatically connect you in most people minds with Slytherin’s line. If the Dark Army spies hear about a 14 year-old Parselmouth named Tom, they may grab you no matter what their profile says.”

Now Tom felt a sense of guilt. His father was doing everything in his power to protect Tom and the rest of the family. The Dark Lord wanted the Heir of Slytherin for his own purpose. And here he was, telling his friends exactly who he was. While he tried to change his House, the adult world was trying to drag him into the war.

Tom realized the ‘right’ thing to do for his own protection was to put aside his plans for developing the true vision of Slytherin. But who knew how long this war would last? Tom felt this had to be done while he was a student. Once he left school, it would be much more difficult to influence the direction of the students in the House. Right now he was one of their own. As a Fourth year, he was at the prefect point. He was old enough to be taken seriously, but still young enough to have time to turn the House. If he waited until Sixth or Seventh year, he would not have enough time to implement his plans.

Tom struggled with what the right thing to do was. He knew what his father would say. Keeping him safe would be the most important thing. But what would Harry Potter say? Tom had heard stories about his father’s time at Hogwarts since he first learned the truth about who his father was and their connection.

The lesson Tom remembered hearing in all the Harry Potter stories was Harry always did what was necessary to protect others and fight evil. He was driven to it. Why did Harry have to rescue the Philosopher’s Stone as a First year? After he learned of the Prophecy, Tom could accept that as a motive, but even before then, Harry always worked to help people around him.

“Tom?”

Tom smiled slightly at his father, "Sorry Dad. I got lost in my thoughts." What he was really thinking was 'I glad my father never tries to use Legilimency on me!' while using his rudimentary Occlumency skills to keep the nervousness from showing on his face.

"Tom, keep yourself safe. The most important thing right now is your safety. I don't want to face your mother if anything happened to you."

"Okay, Dad. I'll do my best to make you proud."

Although he felt guilty, Tom was proud of that statement. What he meant by making his father proud and what he heard were two different things. This was Tom's turn to do something for his father. The corruption of Slytherin ultimately caused the rise of Lord Voldemort. By correcting that, Tom could ensure all those who died because of his alternate self would be able to live full lives. He would make both the adult James Evans and the teenage Harry Potter proud of him.

After a couple more minutes of small talk, Tom left his father's office. With a big smile, Tom made his way back to his common room.

If Tom turned back to his father's office as he walked away, he would have noticed James standing in the doorway watching him leave. An odd expression halfway between frustration and amusement fought on his face. Once Tom was out of sight, James sighed and walked back to his desk.

James sat in his chair and called up the Marauders' Map to see Tom approaching the Slytherin common room. James watched for a few minutes as Tom's dot was surrounded by dots labeled with his friends' names.

With a muttered, "Mischief Managed," James shut down the Map. Staring out the window James wondered to himself, "Was I always that obvious to Albus when I was about to do something heroically stupid? I think I owe my old Headmaster an apology."

In his imagination, James could hear the old wizard chuckling his agreement and patting him on the shoulder

3 September 1941

Somewhere outside Liverpool

“Have you learned anything yet?”

The question was all the greeting the dark cloaked wizard received as he stepped into the Muggle flat outside of Liverpool. The building looked like any of a dozen similar ones in the area. Most of the residents worked in the various factories and yards. Unemployment was almost unheard of as every hand was pressed into service to help with the Muggle war effort.

No one really noticed the young widowed woman who moved into the flat with her brothers. The neighbors all knew the newcomers worked in one of the factories but they never really asked which one. No magic was used in the flat, but a very subtle ward kept the locals from being too curious about the new tenants.

No one arrived in the flat via magic. No Portkeys or apparitions were permitted within 30 minutes of travel from the flat. No wizards were known to live in their area of Liverpool. None of the Dark Army agents wanted the British Ministry of Magic to become curious about who was using magic in the area.

Acturus Black was not happy with the restriction. Traveling by Muggle means was beneath the dignity of a Black. Enlisting with the Dark Lord was a move to preserve the Ancient and Noble Family of Black. The British Ministry was being led astray by Muggle-lovers like Potter and that idiot Unspeakable, the Count! Unfortunately, the Dark Lord's lackeys did not seem to recognize the honor he did them by joining their forces.

The Dark Lord promised the Black family dominion over all Britain after Grindelwald's victory. Acturus Black would be the Dark Lord's regent in Britain whilst Grindelwald directly ruled the rest of Europe. Thus Black would be able to ensure the survival of his family and the other right thinking Pureblood families of England.

“Have you learned anything yet?”

The bored condescension of the witch's voice caused Black's blood to boil.

In cool, aristocratic tones Black answered, "My son sent me a detailed profile on all of the incoming First years at Hogwarts. None of them fit the profile precisely. Two boys fit the correct physical profile. We confirmed neither are orphans. One is a Pureblood Ravenclaw and I know his family. The other is a Muggle-born Hufflepuff. Slytherin's Heir is not at Hogwarts."

The witch nodded, "One of our sympathizers who 'fled' France procured a minor position at the Phoenix school. One student there seems to fit the profile but it may be a stretch."

One of the Dark Army wizards asked, "Could he be home schooled? I didn't attend a magical school. My parents trained me themselves. If their Ministry learned who the boy was they could have prevented him from attending their school, Christina."

The Dark witch nodded her agreement. "What you say makes sense, Wolfgang. Black, find out if the Ministry has him stashed somewhere. Otherwise we may need to try to grab this boy from the Phoenix school and 'test' him."

Black nodded, "It will take time. I dare not move too fast or I will draw attention to myself. I noticed they started watching the Wizengamot members closer than before."

Christina waved his concern away. "Just get the information. Oh, and have your son look at the Second years at Hogwarts also. He may have started earlier than we expected."

Black visibly clenched his jaw at the witch's obvious dismissal. Instead of the hex he desperately wanted to cast, he simply said, "Very well." Then he turned to make his way back home.

Chapter 27 – Professor Evans

31 October 1941 – Hogsmeade

Contrary to the beliefs of the Headmaster, Professor Evans did not teach at the Phoenix school. The class was taught and the students would tell everyone that their teacher was Professor Evans, founder of the Phoenix Foundation. However, they would have been incorrect.

The Department of Mysteries provided an Unspeakable with teaching experience using Polyjuice. James reckoned if it was good enough for his Fourth year with 'Moody' then it would be okay here. The Phoenix class used James's lesson plans so no harm should be done.

James divided the time this freed up by seeing to his other duties. The Count still attended a number of meetings as Thomas Potter's advisor on operational issues. Most of his advice was for Thomas to leave the planning of the operations to the Aurors and Unspeakables and just tell them what they needed to have done. Many in the Ministry were surprised by Thomas's calm acceptance of the Count's advice. Thomas couldn't tell them that he trusted that if his *grandson* said it was right, then he knew it would be right.

The Wolf also tended to make appearances on Professor Evans's times away from Hogwarts. Wolf was generally accepted now by the students. Although they were still a bit wary of the large wolf, they realized he would not hurt them. James particularly enjoyed spending time in the Gryffindor common room. The Gryffindors could not figure out how a Slytherin's pet kept getting past the Fat Lady. James did not spend too much time there however. The attention from a particular First year half giant was embarrassing.

Last but not least was James's time at home. Both sets of twins were growing so fast. They were also driving poor Sarah crazy being confined to the hidden house. Sarah used James's time at home to visit friends and spend time with her husband. Sarah realized a war was going on in both the magical and Muggle worlds. She realized she was luckier than many wives caught up in the war. Her husband managed to spend most nights at home.

Sarah was currently laughing at her husband. Harry James Potter, also known as: James Evans, The Boy-Who-Lived, The Chosen One, The Count, The Defeater of Voldemort and the most feared Unspeakable facing Grindelwald was currently crying for mercy while under attack. The attackers showed no mercy on the wizard. With a final gasp, James wilted under the attack and stopped moving.

The attackers danced around the body hooting their victory. Sarah clapped from her place watching from the doorway.

The defeated wizard opened one eye and mock glared at his wife. "You could have helped you know."

Sarah smiled innocently, "I was torn on which side to assist. So I stayed neutral."

"Mummy told us where you were ticklish!" Katie giggled.

Sarah snatched up her eldest daughter and launched her own tickling attack. "You weren't supposed to tell him that!"

James used this distraction to get his own revenge. Wandless, silent Tickling Charms hit Sarah, Katie and Michael. He opted to use the Muggle way on the two smallest attackers. Ron and Tia ran giggling from the room as fast as their tiny legs could carry them with their father in pursuit.

Their visitor found the Evans family lying in a heap on their living room floor. They were all tickled out and simply enjoying being together.

"Doesn't this look like an interesting story?" the visitor asked as he stepped into the room.

Michael jumped up. "Grandpa! We tickled Daddy 'til he gave up. Mummy helped!"

Thomas Potter bent down and scooped up his great-grandson. "And I'm very proud of you. I'm sure he deserved it."

Michael giggled his agreement.

James sat up and smiled at his grandfather. "Hello, Thomas. What brings you around today?"

Thomas ignored the question to mockingly scold his grandson. "And where were the vaunted wards you bragged about? I walked right in here. I could have been anyone!"

James grinned, "The wards told me you were here and you were alone. Also since the Fidelius is still up, I knew it could only be certain people."

"Cheeky brat. Show some respect for your patriarch."

"I guess it is a Potter trait. After all, I was just attacked by my children."

Thomas grinned at the smiling Michael in his arms. "And they seem to have done a very fine job of it."

Sarah gathered herself and rose to her feet. She gave Thomas a kiss in passing and asked, "Would you care for some tea? We were about to have some when the children attacked."

"That would be lovely dear. Thank you."

Taking a more serious expression, James asked, "Do we have business to discuss?"

Thomas shrugged. "Not the type you are referring to. Family business."

James looked a bit confused at that. After sending the children off to play, James and Thomas followed Sarah into the kitchen.

After they were seated with their tea, James turned to his grandfather, "So what is the problem?"

Thomas grimaced slightly, "It's not a problem really. I received an owl last night from my nephew, Charlus. He married his Hogwarts sweetheart right after he graduated in '37. Her family wasn't too thrilled so they left England. They left the summer before I found out

you were a Potter. He wrote me he is coming back with his wife and their son.”

Sarah looked confused. James could understand it because that was how he felt. Sarah spoke for both of them. “You don’t seem like you think that is a good thing.”

Thomas sighed. “The Potters have had children in every Hogwarts house. Most are in Gryffindor or Ravenclaw, but we have had several in Slytherin and Hufflepuff that I know of in the last three hundred years alone. Charlus is my younger brother’s only son. My brother, Jonathan, was not very good with business. He was a happy go lucky sort. He died rather young due to an illness to his magical core.”

Thomas sipped his tea. “Charlus is the opposite of my brother. He became a Slytherin to my brother’s Hufflepuff. Very ambitious. He met Dorea Black whilst at Hogwarts. Her family disapproved because he came from the ‘poor’ branch of the Potters. They wed without permission and he took a position with Gringotts in India. He is now the highest ranking English wizard in the India branch of Gringotts. His letter said he had taken a new position in the bank here in Diagon Alley.”

“So why are you so concerned?” James asked.

“I don’t think his reasons for returning here are simply a job transfer.” Thomas frowned, “My nephew looked at my childless status and assumed the Potter heritage would go to him after my death.”

Now Sarah nodded in understanding. “Yes, that explains a lot.”

“Hello? Can someone explain to me?” James asked plaintively.

Sarah smiled mischievously. “You mean the big, scary Unspeakable is clueless?”

“Yes.”

Thomas chuckled weakly while Sarah answered. “As an old Pureblood family, the Potters have a seat on the Wizengamot. The old families usually maintain collections of magic discoveries that are

never shared outside the family. Then there is also the Potter money to be mentioned.”

Thomas nodded his agreement. “Charlus is not aware of our family’s special heritage. It is only shared with the senior line. But he does want the stuff he knows about and the money.”

Now James was nodding his head in understanding. “Your adoption of an ‘outsider’ into the Potter clan has thrown his plans into doubt.”

“Even if I hadn’t adopted you and something had happened to me, you would still be my closest kin. The magical nature of the family trust would immediately turn to you as my heir. I can’t explain to my nephew though that you are my grandson from the future where I had a son.”

“No,” James agreed, “even for a wizard that would be stretching believability unless you were involved with the Department of Mysteries.” James settled back into his chair. “I remember seeing the Potter connection on the Black family tree.”

“Her family was not happy with her running off, but since Charlus was a Slytherin and a Pureblood they didn’t disown her,” Thomas explained. “I never thought of it, but I guess he was dead in your future too.”

“I don’t remember when he died but it was before I was born. I never heard about his son.” James stared off for a second. “I wonder if Voldemort got them too,” he wondered in a distracted voice.

“It doesn’t really matter, James,” Sarah said taking his hand. “You have killed Voldemort three times now. Once as a babe, once on the battlefield and now by giving him his soul back. Tom idolizes you more than any other son I’ve ever seen.” She smiled slightly. “In any other case I would say he does too much.”

“He is a good kid,” James agreed. He turned back to his grandfather, “How do you want to handle this?”

“Elizabeth is holding a welcome home party for him a week from tonight. All of magical Society will be there. The night before the party

we will have a Potter Family dinner. You and the kids are all invited, including Tom. I guess that is when we find out if my fears are true.”

“Relax, Thomas,” James reassured him. “We’ll see what he wants and take it from there.”

3 November 1941 – Hogwarts

“Remember your instructions. Bow to your opponent.”

Five sets of Fourth year students gave nervous bows as they faced each other across a dueling mat.

“Ready. Begin.”

Ten fourteen year old voices cried out a variety of spells, curses, hexes and charms. A rainbow of lights zinged in both directions. Eight of the ten students ended up on the mats in the first five seconds of their duels. Only Tom and Janek remained on their feet of the ten.

“Stop.”

The two boys glanced around and saw they were the only ones standing. They shared a grin over the bodies of their fallen classmates.

“If you can, please return to your seats.” Tom, Janek and three others walked back to their seats unassisted. The professor walked through the remaining five casting Finites until they were free of any spell effects. Then they also returned to their seats.

When everyone was seated, the professor turned to the students. “What did we learn from that little demonstration?” A number of hands went up. A Ravenclaw girl was called on. “Yes, Ms. Jones?”

The young girl rose next to her seat. “Sir, we learned the importance of always keeping our shields up. Since you did not allow us to use shields most of the students were hit.”

“Perhaps, Ms. Jones. Yet why weren’t all of the students hit if no one had shields?”

The Ravenclaw's face seemed to become a bit frustrated. "Maybe their opponents had bad aim or they got their spells off first."

"A possibility. Mr. Evans, Mr. Nowicki, please join me on the training mat."

The two boys ran out onto the mat and moved to the normal starting positions. Tom leaned over and whispered into Janek's ear. The Polish wizard nodded his agreement.

"No, I want you both on the same side." The professor turned to the class. "Ms. Smith, would you agree that the previous exercise indicated these two boys are either the fastest casters or the most accurate in the group?"

"Yes, Professor Evans."

James moved to the starting position opposite the boys. "At my mark, we will duel. You may use shields but I will not." James drew his wand and said, "Begin."

Tom and Janek immediately cast two offensive spells. The spells were accurately cast towards where their professor had been standing. The spells passed six inches to the left of where the professor now stood. Two more red Stunners followed. They were a bit more spread out to prevent James from simply sidestepping them. However they were a bit too spread as he simply turned sideways between the spells.

Janek showed a strong aptitude for magical combat. All of his spells were accurately cast at James center of mass. The spells came in quickly and with strength behind them. In James's evaluation, he placed Janek above OWL standard. He had excellent skills for a wizard only months into his Fourth year.

James had to fight a smile of pride dodging Tom's spells. To an outsider, they seemed less focused and off target than Janek's spells. Some came in at knee level but were quickly followed by others at shoulder level. The combination of Janek's center mass aiming and Tom's alternating targeting made dodging a bit more challenging. Tom's extra training at home was obvious in his strategy.

After five minutes of dodging, James decided to end the duel. As Tom cast another spell, James sent a quick Stunner his way. James knew Tom would not have time to get a shield up before the spell hit and he seemed to be caught flatfooted.

James was a bit shocked when the spell hit a shield. The shield flared into visibility momentarily as the spell energy dissipated against the shield. "How had the cheeky bugger managed that?" James wondered. As Tom started to cast another offensive spell, James deduced his answer.

Janek.

The Polish wizard had moved behind Tom and stopped casting offensive spells. He held his wand at the ready to cast the *defensive* spells of the pairing. James felt a wave of admiration for Tom's tactics. Only one minor mistake. James sent several more spells in their direction to boost their confidence. Janek, concentrating on defense only was able to hold the shield s up. Then, once they were lined up right, James struck.

"Accio Janek"

James did not put a whole lot of power behind the spell. It was just enough to pull the boy forward to crash with a tangle into Tom. The Fourth year wizards ended up in a heap on the floor. James smirked and sent two Tickling Charms at the helpless wizards.

While the two boys laughed under the spells effects, James turned back to his class. "I think there were more lessons in that demonstration then I intended. Could you name one, Ms. Zamoyska?"

Ela stood up and said, "Yes, sir. Don't mess up your professor's demonstration." The class chuckled as James smiled at the two boys. "Yes, that would be one."

With a simple wave of his wand, the spell on the boys was cancelled. They sat for a moment before rising and moving back to their seats. Tom sent an exaggerated pout in the direction of his teacher.

“What was the lesson I intended you to see in that lesson, Ms. Greengrass?”

Laura stood up. “Uh, if you move from where the spell was aimed, you don’t need shields?”

James nodded his approval. “Yes, Ms. Greengrass. Dodging spells sent your way is more effective than any shield.” Six hands went up among the Ravenclaws. James motioned them down. “I am sure your questions are all variants on ‘How can it be more effective, professor?’” The Ravenclaws all nodded somewhat sheepishly.

“Two reasons. The first is dodging uses no magical energy. The second, some spells, like the Unforgivables, cannot be blocked by magical shields. If you are completely dependent on Shield Spells to protect you, you will make yourself more vulnerable to those types of spells. Learning to dodge will be an important part of your skills in this class.”

“The one thing dodging does cost you is physical stamina. Many wizards and witches choose not to spend much time on manual exercises. If you wish to receive an O in this class I suggest you start some form of physical exercise.”

A chime sounded throughout the school indicating the end of class. James glanced up at the wall clock and dismissed the class. “Read chapter 7 of your Magical Combat for Beginners. For extra credit, create and implement a training regimen that stretches your current limits. Dismissed. Have a good week.”

The students moved to gather their things to get down to the Great Hall for lunch.

“Mr. Evans, please stay around for a moment.”

The rest of the class filtered out of the room for lunch. Nott and Tom’s other friends loitered around the door until James waved them off. “I am sure Mr. Evans will be safe enough with me. He will join you at lunch.”

The Fourth years laughed and moved off to the Great Hall. Although Professor Evans was known as a tough but fair teacher, they had no doubts Tom was safe with his father.

“That was a sneaky tactic you came up with.”

Tom grinned cheekily, “Nott and I came up with it. If we had been paired up we might have gotten you. You cheated summoning Janek.”

“I cheated?” James asked with a raised brow. “I must have missed that in the dueling rulebook.” Tom laughed at the comment.

“Speaking of cheating, know anything about the round of pranks that have been played on the Prefects meetings?”

“Someone played some pranks on the prefects. Who would do such a thing to such a fine, upstanding group such as that?” Tom asked with a straight face.

“It was very interesting. At first it looked like a Hufflepuff played the prank. Headmaster Dippet refused to believe a member that House would do such a thing. Further investigation makes it look like a member of Richelieu House did the deed and tried to place the blame on Hufflepuff. It was very cleverly done, but I have to wonder if there wasn't an additional layer or two.”

“I am shocked that you would think that a Hogwarts student would be so devious.” Tom protested.

“Perhaps.” James allowed with only a ghost of a smile. “On another topic, we will be attending a dinner at the Potter's on Thursday night and a party on Friday.” James explained the situation to Tom.

Tom sighed. He hated formal parties. “Okay Dad. Is Mum going to send up my dress robes?”

After settling the details of leaving for the two evenings, James sent his son to lunch. As Tom reached the classroom door, James called out.

“Oh, and Tom?”

“Yeah, Dad?”

“Nice job on the prank. Having them perform Puck’s closing apology from “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” was classic. I thought Flitwick was going to hurt himself laughing so hard.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

6 November 1941 – Potter Manor

The Evans family arrived via Floo. James landed at his grandmother’s feet. An instant later a small boy arrived on top of him.

“I see Michael has inherited the Potter Floo Curse,” Elizabeth laughed.

Sarah, holding the youngest twins, stepped gracefully from the fire. Katie arrived holding Tom’s hand. Seeing her father and twin on the floor, Katie promptly giggled and performed a belly flop on top of her father.

“Hello, Elizabeth,” Sarah greeted her with a kiss. “Excuse the less mature members of my family. They just like to make a big entrance.”

“Oi! Is it my fault the Floo hates me?” James asked from the floor.

A young, 22 year-old wizard with black hair slightly more in control than James’s wandered into the room and looked down at the group on the floor. A glass of wine in his hand, he was dressed in very expensive robes of the highest quality. A small smirk curled one corner of his mouth.

“Ah, the new family members have arrived in true Potter fashion.”

The comment was delivered in the same dry, condescending tone Draco Malfoy would use to taunt Harry and his friends. James fought to push down his retort.

Instead he struggled to his feet and approached his father's previously unknown cousin. "Charlus, it is nice to meet you. I am James."

"So you are the one who tricked my uncle into taking you into the Potter family. Don't go getting any ideas about being more than you are."

James was stunned the man would be so blunt and aggressive in his stance. Apparently he wasn't the only one.

Elizabeth snapped, "Charlus Atorius Potter! I am shocked at your poor manners!"

"Yes, Aunt Elizabeth," Charlus said dismissively without removing his eyes from James.

Using all of his Occlumency skills to maintain control of his temper and his magic, James replied, "Thomas and Elizabeth were kind enough to adopt myself and my family into the Potters. If you are concerned about money, I assure you that I have more than enough of my own. Our bonds are familial, not fiscal."

A slow smile formed on Charlus's lips. "You sound like a Potter. Between the hair and the Floo landing, I'd say you were a Potter." Charlus stuck his hand out. "Welcome to the family."

The Evans family was introduced to the family of Charlus Potter. Dorea Potter physically reminded James of Narcissa Malfoy but without the sour something-died-in-here-and-it-stinks expression. She seemed a quiet, but intelligent woman. She did not say much but when she did her comments seemed clear, concise and to the point. She seemed to play the perfect, Pureblood wife but James wondered if it was just a public front. Three year-old Albert Potter seemed a bit nervous around so many strangers. His eyes lit up on seeing Katie and Michael though and the three children were soon playing a game that involved a great deal of laughing.

The three adult wizards, and Tom, moved into Thomas's study. Once they were comfortably seated Charlus started with an apology.

“James, I would like to apologize for my comments when you arrived. I was a bit surprised when Uncle Thomas told me about the adoption of your family. Honestly, four years ago that really would have been my reaction.”

Thomas nodded his unconscious agreement. “What changed, Chaz?”

Charlus smiled, “You haven’t called me Chaz in years, Uncle Thomas. It is surprisingly nice to hear again. It drove me spare as a kid.” He shrugged the comment off and then answered his uncle’s question. “Four years working on my own with a family changed me. I worked for every Knut I own. Dorea worked as a Charms tutor from our house to help make extra money until Albert was born.”

“Working for the goblins helped too. They didn’t care about my family bloodline.” Charlus smirked, “They hate all wizards equally. But I learned to work with them and they accepted me when I turned out to have a flair for investing. I will be the first wizard ever on the staff of Gohtook. He is the senior investor for all Gringotts. I will be the most junior staff member, but I will still be there.”

“So why the act?” James asked. He had been using a very low level of Legilemency in an effort to detect any falsehood.

“I wanted to see if you were attempting to use Uncle Thomas and Aunt Elizabeth for your own ends.” The young wizard shrugged. “It seemed like a good way to get a quick read on your reactions. It is a common goblin tactic.”

“A Slytherin one too.” Tom commented. Aside from polite greetings, they were the first words Tom said since arriving.

“Do you have something against wizards from my old House?” Charlus asked with a slight edge in his tone.

“Not at all. Some of my best friends are in that House.” Tom assured him in a casual tone.

James almost laughed into his wine. Tom’s delivery was so neutral you could read almost anything into it. Thomas snorted his amusement also.

Charlus seemed to realize something was hidden in those words and looked quizzically at James. James took pity on him and explained. "Tom is a Fourth year in Slytherin. He is the Seeker on their Quidditch team."

Charlus smiled, "Oh good, another Slytherin in the Potter family. We need some good influences. Too many Gryffindors you know."

By the end of the night, James was enjoying himself with his new relative. The wives seemed to become friendly also. Charlus was about five years younger than James. (The whole time travel thing made figuring his age a bit more difficult.) Having a blood relative near his own age was a novel experience for James. Although he remembered Thomas's concerns about his nephew, James was prepared to give his cousin the room to prove himself.

There was never any discussion on sharing any information about James's or Tom's true origins with Charlus. The wizard was too unknown to be trusted with that type of information.

7 November 1941 – Department of Mysteries

The Count sat in his office in the early morning leafing through numerous intelligence reports concerning the war against Grindelwald. It was amazing the number of scrolls Ministry workers could fill with absolutely no information. He idly wondered if that was due to Hogwarts tendency to base assignments on the amount of parchment filled. Maybe they should give bonus points for answering the professor's question completely in the least amount of space? He'd have to talk to Albus about that.

He particularly enjoyed the one from a deep cover agent in Berlin. Claude Delacour seemed to be thriving in his undercover assignment. The French Auror left the work detail when a full-time position opened up for a manager in the Beer Hall. Together with Maria, they had become a prime source of information on events in and around the German capital.

Claude's reports were concise but very amusing in a dry way. James looked forward to reading them for a couple reasons aside from information and entertainment. The Auror always included a code

phrase to indicate his status. Only the Count knew how to interpret them. It helped him to know his friend was (relatively) safe and not under coercion.

This latest report was a source of some alarm for James. According to Maria, her youngest sister had not been seen in Germany for some time. A letter from eldest sister Serena indicated she had no knowledge of Christina's whereabouts. The last sighting of her was on 27 March, just over a week before Grindelwald's aborted invasion."

James did not like the coincidence.

The Count spent the remainder of his morning in various meetings discussing the war effort. The Ministry was training a number of witches and wizards as Hit Wizards. The training program turned them out in the magical equivalent of infantry soldiers. As James fought to remain alert through the boring presentation by yet another Ministry worker, the conference room door swung open.

A junior Unspeakable ran into the room. "We have a situation out at the Phoenix school. A boy was snatched from the village. A couple of the professors attempted to stop the abduction. We have dead and injured all over the place. It appears they were a Dark Army unit."

The Count appeared in the village within two minutes of the alert being given. A number of pops an instant later resulted in two Unspeakables teams arriving behind him. The first team was run by his old mission mate, Charlie. The witch had risen to the challenges of her position and become one of the best team leaders in the Department of Mysteries. The other team was led by a leader James knew little about, only that he had a good reputation in the Department.

At a gesture from the Count, the two teams spread out to search the village for any sign of the attackers. A medical team from St. Mungos and an Auror investigation team were on their way. Although the Unspeakables received word at the same time as Magical Law Enforcement, the DMLE took a bit longer to get their act together.

“And they don’t improve over the next fifty years either,” James muttered thinking about the Aurors’ poor response times in the war against Voldemort.

James approached a pair of witches kneeling next to a wounded student. James guessed the young witch to be in her Fourth or Fifth year. James recognized both of the older witches as teachers from the Phoenix school. Since he was here in his Unspeakable robes, they did not recognize him.

“Medical help is on the way. Can you tell me what happened here?”

One of the witches looked up from her efforts. James knew she was the Potions Mistress at the school originally from the Netherlands. “We took some of the First and Fourth year Herbology students on a hike to look for magical plants hidden in the hills around us for the morning. We stopped here in the village for lunch as a treat for the students. They came out of nowhere. Professor Evans tried to stop them but there were too many of them. They held him off and grabbed poor Malcolm. Then they ran out of the village.”

James felt a cold shot of adrenalin hit his heart. “Where is Professor Evans? Who is Malcolm?”

The Potions Mistress didn’t seem to be tracking too well as shock set in. “Professor Evans? I think he went after them. He was the only one still cursing them as they left. Malcolm O’Connor is one of our Phoenix kids from the orphanage. He is a good boy. Why would the Dark Army want Malcolm?”

James was furiously pondering the same question. What would the Dark Army want with an orphan from London? Then it hit him.

The Unspeakable almost sighed out, “Oh, dear God, no!” Then he looked at the witch again. “Do you know when Malcolm was born?”

“What?” the confused witch asked.

“His birthday, when is his birthday?”

“Um, 1 January. Why? Is it important?”

James ignored the question. 'We led them straight to him. No one ever checked to see if any of the Phoenix kids matched the fake profile!'

A series of small pops announced the arrival of the Healers. "The Healers will be with you in a moment. Excuse me."

James turned and walked quickly away. In a short time he found Charlie.

Without preamble he asked, "Any signs?"

The Unspeakable team leader nodded, "We think they left in a Muggle car. We found no trace of Apparition or Portkey use outside the village. Unspeakable Jones is Muggleborn. His grandfather was some crazy Yank cowboy who taught him to track animals 'Muggle-style'. He was able to follow them up to a dirt lane just over the hills with several tire tracks. He couldn't find any sign of them on foot again."

The glimmerings of a plan started to come to James's mind. "Have Jones meet me at the edge of the village in three minutes." After Charlie agreed, James moved back to the Phoenix Potion Mistress.

"Do you have anything that belongs to the boy?"

The witch pointed to a small pile of abandoned rucksacks. "His bag should be over there. We had the children leave them here whilst we ate."

James quickly searched the bag until he found one with Malcolm's name magically written on it. Leaving the rest of the bags behind, James ran to meet Jones. (The sight of an Unspeakable *running* through the town was almost as unnerving to the villagers as the attack itself.)

Jones was waiting when James arrived. "Let's go."

After several minutes run through the woods they reached the small dirt lane. It was a single rutted track. It had probably been here for centuries and saw Roman soldiers pass by.

James turned to Jones. "Head back to the village. Tell Charlie to have both teams prepared to respond at my signal."

The young Unspeakable was well trained and knew not to ask questions. "Yes, sir!" Then he turned and started to run back to the village.

James opened the rucksack and started searching through it. A small, water-proof cloak was crumpled at the bottom of the bag. James pulled it out and gave it a quick inspection. It seemed used and not just something the boy packed because a teacher told him to. James set the bag down and lay the cloak on top of it. Then he stepped back.

An instant later, a large grey wolf stood in the lane. The wolf approached the cloak and sniffed it. The wolf has a highly developed sense of smell. In perfect conditions a wolf can detect a prey's scent over 1.5 miles away. The wolf-mind of James's animagus form had no problem detecting the smell of a small human on the cloak. The stink of diesel fumes also filled the lane.

James sniffed in either direction to determine which direction the Muggle vehicle had gone. Choosing a direction the wolf darted down the track. Pausing a hundred yards down the track, James sniffed again. The scent remained. He had their track.

The wolf moved quickly down the dirt track. He did not sprint as that would soon tire him out. Rather he moved at a nice ground devouring loop. The wolf's easy strides moved him down the lane quicker than a Muggle vehicle of the time would be willing to attempt.

The wolf ran for ten minutes before the dirt track crossed a small paved country road. James paused to sniff the air. An odd tang in the air caused him to sneeze. The wolf-mind was confused by the smell but James understood someone had used magic in an attempt to prevent anyone from following.

Their plan was rather clever James conceded. They obviously had scouted the Phoenix school and decided a direct assault would be too hazardous. So they bided their time until their target entered the village. Using purely Muggle transportation greatly reduced the probability of magical tracking being effective. This small exertion of

magic here would probably thwart most purely Muggle means of following the kidnappers. Fortunately, James had means at his disposal that merged the two.

The wolf chose a direction and ran along the road for a bit before stopping to sniff. Catching the boy's scent was harder here. The passage of other vehicles left the air laden with petrol and diesel fumes (at least to a wolf's nose). After several tries to confirm it, James was sure he had the scent again.

The wolf ran for three more miles before passing through a Muggle village. In other circumstances James would have found the villagers' reactions to a wolf running through highly amusing. As it was he barely noticed.

Another mile past the village, James realized the scent had ended. The panting wolf slowed to a stop. The wolf turned and started walking back towards the village. After backtracking a couple of hundred yards, James noticed a small turnoff on the other side of the road. A number of bushes had obscured the turnoff from the original direction.

The turnoff was another small, dirt track. James moved into the undergrowth parallel to the track.

Just out of sight of the road, James came to a small clearing. An old farmhouse stood in the center of the clearing. The building appeared to have been here for a very long time. The thatched roof had several obvious bare spots and the walls seemed to be leaning in on one another a bit. An old lorry sat partially obscured behind the house.

The wolf's nose told James the kidnapped boy was very close. He doubted the boy had been Apparated or Portkeyed away yet. The scent was too strong. Now James needed to come up with a plan.

It was about fifty feet from the edge of the clearing to the house. The midday sun stood overhead on an unfortunately clear day. Even the wolf would have a hard time crossing that area unobserved. James decided to move around the edge of the clearing to find a better approach.

Circling halfway around the house, James saw what he needed. An old well stood two-thirds of the way across the clearing. This left it about 15 feet from the back door of the house. The well had a two and a half foot stone wall around it. A wooden lid lay atop the well. By keeping the well's stone sides between himself and the house, he could ensure that at least most of his approach was undetected. It also meant no one in the house could approach the lorry without entering his line of fire.

The wolf did a slow crawl on its belly towards the well. From this perspective he could not see the house, but James hoped that meant they could not see him either.

James reached the well without any spells or alarms going off. He took a deep breath to slow his heart rate. Once he was ready, he slowly stuck his head out around the well.

The wolf's hearing could easily pick up the sounds coming from inside the house. James estimated there were four Dark Soldiers within the house. Another one seemed to be wounded.

Two of the figures moved near the back door to have a quiet conversation in German away from the others' ears. With a wolf's hearing, they might as well have yelled it across the gap between them.

"Christina is not going to be happy we moved this soon."

"It was the perfect chance! How many times do you think that kid would have been wandering around the village?"

"I know that! But she hasn't been able to get our extraction route set up. The damn British wards are going to take time to bypass. If the kid really is the Heir, they are going to call everyone out looking for him."

James had to wonder how they planned to bypass the wards. The only controls on the wards were found in the Department of Mysteries. An assault would have a very low probability of success.

“Bah, our sources say they believe the story of Slytherin’s Heir is a myth.”

“Are we sure he’s the Heir?”

“I sent a vial of his blood ahead. They’ll do a Heritage Ritual to confirm his identity. If he is the Heir, after Johan is safe to move, we will take him back to her flat.” Then the dark wizard shrugged, “If not, then we’ll kill him and throw his body down that well.”

James had heard enough. Pulling back behind the well, he returned to his human form. With a quick twitch of his arm, his wand was in his hand.

One of the two dark wizards talking in the door way happened to be looking in the direction of the well when James popped up on the other side of the well. The figure in Unspeakable robes seemed to appear out of nowhere. The only coherent thought going through the mind of the surprised wizard was, ‘I didn’t hear the Apparition Alarms.’

“Accio soldiers!”

The two wizards in the doorway were suddenly yanked out of the house as if by a giant hand. The one wizard, not having seen James appear had no idea what was happening.

As the two wizards hurtled towards him, James judged their flight path with the eye of an experienced Seeker. At the appropriate moment, James ended his spell while his left hand snatched up the well’s wooden lid.

The two wizards started to drop as soon as the spell ended. Unfortunately for them, their forward motion continued. The wizards smashed into the inside of the well’s stone wall with a bone snapping crunch. Gravity did the rest.

“Oops!” James grinned. Two down, two to go.

James cast a modified Shield Charm followed by a temporary Apparition ward. ‘Hopefully, that will keep them from leaving.’

A Dark Soldier appeared in the door with his wand drawn. Spotting the Unspeakable, the wizard reddened and pointed his wand.

“Ava-“

“Tarantus!”

A fork of lightning shot out of the end of James’s wand. A loud crack of thunder smashed through the air with a concussive force.

Picking himself up off the ground, James thought, ‘Note to self: don’t use the Lighting Charm on a close target.’

The fourth able bodied Dark Soldier had been standing near his partner when the Lightning Charm struck. James found him unconscious with a probable concussion from an impact with the fireplace.

James spotted the kidnapped Malcolm lying in a corner. The Unspeakable knelt next to the boy to check him for injuries.

A voice came out of nowhere. “He is only asleep.”

James reacted instantly to face the possible threat. He need not have bothered.

The fifth member of the Dark Army unit lay against an old wardrobe. His right arm had been shredded just above the elbow. James judged it to be the result of a Reducto or other bludgeoning spell rather than any kind of cutting spell by the tangled mess.

“Relax,” the injured wizard said in German accented English. “My wand is somewhere back in the village with the rest of my arm.”

James kept his wand on the man. “Why did you take this boy?”

“I won’t tell you that. You can’t make me. My mental shields keep my mind my own!”

James knew he could use Veritaserum. But he didn’t need to. He knew why they had taken the boy and what they were really after.

“I want you to take a message for me to Christina.”

The Dark Soldier smiled wanly around his agony. “Sorry Unspeakable. Can’t do that. This is as far as I think I’m going.”

“I am the Count. And I can’t have such an excellent messenger dying on me.” The dark wizard gasped when James identified himself, but that was nothing next to the scream that followed. James used the same spell Voldemort used to cauterize Wormtail’s sacrificed arm. It wasn’t even a dark spell. It was simply a very old spell from before nerves and painkillers were understood.

Voldemort used it because he enjoyed causing pain, even to his followers. James used it simply because it was the only spell he knew that would do the job. ‘I have to talk to Sarah about that.’

In a cheerful tone James said, “There, now I think you will survive. At least, long enough to deliver my message.” His tone changed into a serious one. “I know you took some of this boy’s blood. I don’t care why you wanted him. He is under my protection. Tell Christina that I am looking forward to our next encounter.”

James picked up the sleeping boy in one arm. Then he lowered his wards. He looked once more at the gasping man on the floor.

He paused to say, “Remember my message,” and then he Apparated away.

James returned to the village with the unconscious First year wizard cradled safely in his arms. Relaxed in sleep, the boy had not taken any injuries from the Lightning Charm. A few bruises and cuts had occurred during the abduction but nothing serious or apparently permanent.

It did not take long for the Count’s return to be noticed.

“You found Malcolm!” the Potions Mistress yelled as she spotted them.

James was quickly relieved of his bundle as Healers started checking the boy for injuries. James walked away from the commotion and approached a small cluster of Unspeakables and Aurors.

“Report”

The senior Auror cleared his throat. “No other sign of Dark Army activity has been found, sir. Two wizards claiming to be French refugees seem to have been Dark Army sleeper agents. We found one in a Dark Soldier cloak just inside the village. We suspect the Dueling professor caught up to him before he left the village.”

“And the professor? Where is he?”

“We found him near the sleeper agent. Professor Evans is dead, sir.”

A/N: I've received several comments about having Thomas and Elizabeth as Harry's grandparents rather than Charlus and Dorea. Sirius never points out to Harry that they are his grandparents (and thus related to Sirius) but he does point out the connections to the two adult Weasleys. The HP Lexicon also downplays the likelihood of the connection. On the site, they indicate that JKR said in an interview that the Potter grandparents died of old age. According to the Black Family Tree, Dorea would have been only 57 when she died. Much too young for a witch to die of old age.

A/N2: I've updated chapters 3,11, and 12 to remove a couple minor inconsistencies. Nothing to change the story, just some minor background stuff.

Chapter 28 – Repercussions

“We found him near the sleeper agent. Professor Evans is dead, sir.”

The Auror’s words smashed into James like a physical blow. For a moment, James could only stare at the Ministry wizard in shock, his mind ablaze as random thoughts popped into his head. Had they sent someone to Sarah yet? Who else knew?

Keeping his voice normal, James asked, “Has this been reported yet?”

The Auror seemed unaware of the shock he’d just delivered. “Yes, sir. The investigation team is starting to fully document the incident now. We sent the preliminary reports into the Minister’s office and St. Mungos as per standing orders.” The Auror pointed over towards three Aurors walking around the battlefield. James recognized the lead Auror and one of his assistants.

“Very good. I will return to the Ministry to report my findings.” James walked quickly towards the Apparition point. He needed to fix this quick!

7 November 1941 – Hogwarts (12:00)

The Fourth year Slytherin crowd wandered into the Great Hall together for lunch. Tom and Janek were involved in an argument over the translation of an ancient rune they had just studied in class. Around them the collection of friends talked and laughed as they made their way to their accustomed seats.

As they sat down, Tom looked at the only quiet part of the whole noisy bunch. Nott sat quietly next to Laura. The two generally were looking everywhere but at each other although they sat right next to each other.

“Oi you two! Knock it off!” The rest of the friends quieted slightly to hear what Tom had to say. “Would you two get over it!”

Nott turned to glare at his best mate. “It is all your fault! You and that bloody snake!”

Tom gave his friend an innocent smile. "Hey, is it my fault you picked the broom closet Nagini was sleeping in?"

Laura went a bit red. "Nagini doesn't sleep in the broom closets! It's too cold! You sent her there!"

"How would I know to send her there? I didn't even know you two were dating!" Tom protested innocently. "I NEVER told her to go into that closet or to scare you." Tom was telling the literal truth. He never told Nagini to scare them out of the closet. Rather, he had asked his father to do it after they'd been seen on the new Marauders Map.

Nott looked suspiciously at his friend. It sounded like Tom was telling the truth, but he still felt like behind that innocent smile that Tom was still responsible for his humiliation. His suspicion increased with Tom's next comment.

"After all, if you had told your best mate, I would have made sure you weren't disturbed." Ela, Mary, and Andrea giggled at the innocent resignation in Tom's voice. "It really is too bad the Hufflepuff Quidditch squad was walking by when you came screaming out." Tom grinned wickedly. "I heard one of the First year 'Puffs had his camera."

The surrounding students started laughing at Tom's expression of innocence (which no one believed) combined with the stunned outrage on Nott and Laura's faces.

Nott dropped his head onto the table. "Tom, you are a git." He looked up at Tom with a sad expression on his face. "I'm sorry, Tom. I know you are jealous over the fact I have a girlfriend and you can't decide on which one of these lovely young ladies you would like to date. I'm sure one day you will make up your mind. At least if they are willing to wait that long."

Tom face dropped at Nott's shot back. The girls seemed to battle conflicting responses. Outrage and embarrassment warred with laughter over Tom's predicament.

Tom opened his mouth to respond when Nott interrupted. "Hey, if you don't want me to know these things then you shouldn't talk in your sleep."

Tom was utterly gobsmacked by Nott's comments. "I don't talk in my sleep!"

Nott gave a sly smile as Laura buried her face in Nott's shoulder and started to giggle. He said, "So you admit then that you can't make up your mind?"

The students surrounding the two boys couldn't take it anymore. The entire Slytherin table within earshot started to laugh as Tom's face went red with frustration and embarrassment. Tom looked around helplessly for several moments at the laughing students before giving it up.

Tom started to chuckle a bit as the humor of the situation struck him. "Oh forget you all. Prats."

The table settled down after a couple more minutes. The food had arrived, diverting the students from their entertainment. Tom occasionally threw a glare at his friend but couldn't face Nott's mocking grin for too long.

"Mr. Evans."

Tom turned to find the Headmaster standing behind him.

"Hello, sir."

Professor Dippet looked a bit more solemn than his normal serious demeanor. "Please accompany me to my office, Mr. Evans."

After exchanging a quick glance with Nott, Tom rose from his seat and followed the older wizard to the Headmaster's office.

Laura turned to her boyfriend once Tom was out of earshot. "Do you believe Tom when he said he didn't send his snake into the closet?"

“He was a bit too smug in his protests,” Nott smiled slightly. “I know he didn’t send the damn snake. But I bet he asked Professor Evans to do it.” The other students sitting around them laughed at Nott’s comment.

Watching Tom leave with the Headmaster, Nott turned to his girlfriend and muttered, “We haven’t done any pranks lately. What could Tom be in trouble for?”

Andrea heard the question and commented, “Dippet did not look angry. He looked resigned or sad.”

The rest of the friends watched the two wizards go with a sense of dread.

ADAD

Tom followed behind the silent Headmaster on the way to the office. The gargoyle stepped aside as they approached without a word from the Headmaster. In an all too brief time they were walking into the Headmaster’s office. When they arrived Tom noticed a witch in Healer’s robes sitting in the office.

Dippet indicated an empty chair. “Please be seated, Mr. Evans.”

Tom sank into the chair. “What is this about sir?”

“Tom, this is Healer Greenleaf. I am afraid we have some bad news for you.”

The witch gave Tom an expression of concerned sympathy. “I am sorry to do this, Mr. Evans. There was an attack this morning at the Phoenix school in Wales by Dark Army forces. Your father, James Evans was killed defending a student they were trying to kidnap.”

The world crashed down around Tom’s head. ‘Dad was dead? Not Dad, he was too good!’ Tom’s brain felt like he had been hit by a Stunner. Nothing seemed to make sense.

“How did he die?”

"We are not sure right now," the Headmaster answered. "We have only received the initial field reports. A further report should be coming in a couple of hours."

Tom sat there lost in his thoughts for a seeming eternity as he tried to deal with the fact that the only father he had ever known was gone. How could this happen? How would they tell the twins?

"Have you told my mother yet?"

The Headmaster and the healer exchanged uncomfortable glances. "Err, we have been unable to locate your mother. We had to tell you now because we needed your help in finding her," the Headmaster explained.

Something about that statement bothered Tom but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. "She wasn't at our house, sir?"

"We seem to have an error in our records, Mr. Evans. Your home address is not within our records."

Tom slumped in to his chair in a boneless heap. The two adults looked at him with renewed concern over his collapse. They did not realize it was stunned relief, not grief.

'His father was alive!' Tom wanted to shout with relief and joy. The Fidelias! The wonderful Fidelius Charm! If it was still up that meant Dad was still alive. Tom took a shuddering breath as the complex emotions hit him fully.

Pulling himself together, Tom looked up. "I need to tell my mother. She needs to hear it from me."

Dippet shook his head. "I am afraid, young Tom, that we cannot allow students to leave the school without an escort in these troubled times. Particularly after the events of this morning."

"Could Professor Dumbledore escort me sir? Our house is under magical wards," Tom explained. "Dad keyed the professor into the wards."

Dippet nodded slowly. "I suppose under these circumstances I can cover Professor Dumbledore's afternoon classes. Very well. Go talk to the professor. I believe he has this period free. Tell him I will take his classes for the rest of the day."

Tom had to brutally resist the urge to jump up from the chair in excitement. He had to pretend he was still in stunned grief over the news. "Thank you sir."

Healer Greenleaf placed her hand on Tom's arm. "Would you like me to come with you? Telling your mother could be a bit much for you. I've worked with your mother in the past. It might be a bit easier for me to tell her."

That sounded like a horrible idea to Tom. "Thank you ma'am. I'd appreciate it but the wards wouldn't let you through." Tom allowed some of his pent up emotion to pass through his body in a shudder. Then he seemed to collect himself and said, "Professor Dumbledore will help me out. He and my parents are old friends."

"If you are sure. I'll walk down to the professor's office with you." She smiled gently. "It is no bother. I haven't been back to Hogwarts in ages."

Tom politely thanked the witch. It was the last thing he wanted but he saw no way to avoid it without raising suspicion.

After thanking the Headmaster, Tom and the healer left to find Professor Dumbledore. Tom only hoped he could reach his mother before she heard the news from another source.

Department of Mysteries: (12:00)

The Count appeared in the secure DOM Apparition area with a barely audible pop. The Count seemed to have Apparated in mid-stride as he was walking out of the arrival point even as he appeared.

The Department of Mysteries was a beehive of activity. The Dark Army assault on the school confirmed the suspicion that a group of the dark wizards had managed to infiltrate Britain on the night of the stopped invasion. The Ministry announced the incident as a victory of

their plan to defend Britain. Now, witches and wizards in Ministry robes moved in chaotic patterns as they scurried about to complete their assigned tasks in an effort to both catch the infiltrators and prevent the Ministry from looking like fools.

The Count cut a path as he moved through this frenzied activity. In his anger, waves of magic rolled off the Unspeakable. Not even the petty bureaucrats wanted to get in his way.

The Count entered Mr. Abel's office to find Abel sitting with Cain and Thomas Potter.

"We have a bit of a problem..." James started.

Thomas nodded, "We heard that 'Professor Evans' died. Unfortunately, St Mungos already received the body from the Aurors. It is too bad about Unspeakable Lovegood. He was a promising young wizard. He should have known better than to take on six Dark Soldiers on his own. I understand his wife just gave birth to their son. Too bad we'll never get to tell them what happened to his father."

"We will deal with that later. Tell us what you learned," Cain ordered.

James frowned. When the Ministry assigned Sol Lovegood to be his alternate instructor he thought it was rather funny to be working with a man who could be Luna's grandfather. There couldn't be that many Lovegood families and with a name like Sol, he would almost have to be from the same family. James was pleased his friend's grandfather would be safe from the war at the Phoenix school.

James wondered if Sol Lovegood died during the war in the previous timeline. It would explain a lot about Luna's father's obsession with the Department of Mysteries if Sol died and the Ministry covered up the circumstances. Did this event preserve the previous timeline or alter it substantially?

Shaking off his thoughts, James told the three about his pursuit of the Dark Soldiers to the old farmhouse. He explained his reconnaissance of the area and his attack on the four dark wizards. Once he finished his report, Cain brought out a Penicillin. Thomas and the two senior Unspeakables entered the memory James placed within the bowl.

“Why didn’t you request support?” Cain asked after he emerged from the memory.

“I was concerned they would leave soon and harm the boy. We know he is not who they were looking for. If they had realized it while holding the boy they would have killed him.”

“Why did you let the one live?” Abel asked.

James was getting frustrated with these questions. “We needed them to leave the boy alone. This seemed to be the best and quickest way of doing that.”

Abel frowned. “Quickest, maybe, but not the best. I think your emotions are a bit too involved here. Letting that wizard go and with that message may have done more harm than good.”

James growled, “Of course my emotions are in play here. We endangered that boy out of our own carelessness! I won’t allow anyone else to die because of my mistakes!”

Thomas fought to hide the surprise he felt at the vehemence in his grandson’s voice. Something was going on here that he did not understand. “James, review the incident like you were critiquing a training exercise.”

His grandfather’s use of his real name grabbed James’s attention for a second. Thomas always called him Count when James worked in his Unspeakable role. It was a security protocol they both followed. One slip in front of unauthorized personnel (including 90 percent of the Ministry) could cause a great deal of damage. James realized his grandfather was sending him a message.

James mentally reviewed his actions as objectively as possible. Treating it as a training exercise helped.

“I made several errors,” James said in a careful voice. “The boy was not in imminent danger. Support could have arrived before the danger became critical. Also allowing the Soldier to return to Christina gives her a couple pieces of information. My assault was a bit reckless. Dropping the two down the well was poetic since they planned that

for the boy, but I failed to secure the room before attending to the boy. If the injured Soldier had his wand, I would be dead.”

Abel nodded. “Exactly. It was more something that I would expect out of a First year Gryffindor than an experienced Unspeakable.” He sighed, “Count, magically you are one of the two or three strongest wizards in Britain. Compared to our average Unspeakable, I believe you operate a full order of magnitude higher. Don’t fall into the trap of believing your magic will be able to carry you through every situation.”

“Count, are you fighting an old battle?” Thomas asked.

James thought for several moments and nodded. “Yes, I think I am.”

Cain stood up and clapped James on the shoulder. “I’m glad that is out of the way. I’d hate to lose you. Now, what are we going to do about you being dead?”

The four wizards discussed different options over the next twenty minutes. Cain suggested allowing the identity to ‘die’ until after the war. Thomas and James both protested this idea for a number of reasons.

Once they all agreed that ‘dying’ was not an option, Abel asked, “So how do we resurrect a dead man?” Several ideas were presented from past Unspeakable operations.

Then James smiled. His past had gotten him into a bit of trouble today. Now it would help get him out of some.

7 November 1941 – The Phoenix School (14:00)

The three wizard investigatory unit from Magical Law Enforcement was forced to call in a wardbreaker to open the door to Professor Evans’s office. The three Aurors were surprised to find such strong locking charms on a simple professor’s office. This case seemed bizarre enough before finding this door. The investigators could not come up with a motive for the Dark Army to attempt something as brazen as a daylight grab of a simple orphan.

Once the charms were broken, the three Aurors entered with their wands drawn. The office was neatly decorated. Although *Professor Evans* was only a part-time member of the staff, he was also *Mr. Evans*, the founder of the Phoenix Foundation. The office was small but contained very expensive looking furniture. The office was very neat with no signs of anything needing the type of wards they had encountered on the door.

“Kevin, look at this trunk.”

Senior Auror Kevin Smith was the lead investigator in the unit. While a Ravenclaw at Hogwarts, a Muggle-born friend introduced him to the works of Sir Author Conan Doyle. The stories fascinated the young Smith and set him on the course for the rest of his life. Something about this case made him wish the Great Detective could step out to give him a hand.

“What did you find, Johnny?”

“This trunk, it doesn’t seem to belong here. It’s all beat up.”

Pointing his wand at the trunk, the Auror cast a couple charms. Raising his eyebrows, he said, “Johnny, open it slowly.” Then he gestured for the second member of his team to take up a position next to the trunk in case something came out. The young Auror stepped to the back of the trunk and grasped the lid. Making sure he was out of the line of fire, the young wizard slowly eased the trunk open. Then he peeked into the open trunk.

Auror Smith grimaced at the contents of the trunk. Great, like this case wasn’t weird enough. “Call the healers. It looks like we may have another victim.”

The Aurors reached into the trunk and pulled out the body they found stuffed inside. Once they had it out of the trunk, they laid it flat on the floor. Then Auror Smith got his first good look at their new victim.

He cast a charm to detect the status of the body. The Senior Auror pointed his wand at the body and said, “*Enervate!*”

The body let out a small gasp as the spell took effect. The eyes slowly opened, wincing in the bright afternoon light. Once his eyes adjusted, their victim glanced at the three Aurors standing over him. He focused on the number two man on the team.

“Auror Moody, you have no idea how ironic it is to see you,” Professor Evans commented with a small smile on his face.

9 November 1941 – Hogsmeade

The Evans family spent the two days since James Evans’s “death” secluded in their house. Tom and Professor Dumbledore reached the house before Sarah could hear from anyone else of the events in Wales. Although she accepted Tom’s logic, Sarah would not relax until James arrived at the front door.

In the aftermath of Friday’s events, James and Tom spent the weekend with the family. The little ones never knew a problem existed so they simply enjoyed Tom’s unexpectedly long visit. Professor Dumbledore returned to Hogwarts to assure the Headmaster that his Dueling Instructor was still amongst the living.

That night after the children were all asleep, James and Sarah sat with Thomas and Elizabeth sipping wine in the James’s study. The elder Potters arrived to check on their grandson and his family.

“We missed you at the party last night,” Thomas commented.

James smirked, “The only good thing about a Dark Army attack is it makes a perfectly acceptable excuse to miss a social event.”

“Lucky for you maybe,” Thomas grunted. “The Minister Floo’d me and directly asked me not to cancel the bloody thing. Said it would be bad for morale if Grindelwald could cause us to change our lives.”

“I think the Minister has a point, Thomas,” Elizabeth interjected. “The event kept people from sitting at home worrying about what was going to happen next.”

“Maybe,” Thomas allowed.

James noticed that Sarah was looking distinctly uncomfortable. He squeezed her hand lightly and asked, "Sarah, are you okay? You look a bit pale."

Sarah smiled slightly and sighed. "I guess Friday's incident scared me more than a bit. I know the war is dangerous and you are always involved. Tom and Albus told me right off that you were safe but I can't help think of the poor man who was taking your place."

Sarah dropped her gaze down to her lap. In a quiet voice she said, "I finished the work on the potion for you to stay here, in this time."

James placed his arms around her. "That is wonderful!" James leaned in to kiss his wife. "I don't want to leave you or the kids. I'm staying right here."

Sarah looked up at James with tears in her eyes. "Did you really think about this? Do you realize all of your magic will be gone? Do you really want to give that all up?"

Pulling his wife close, James said, "I lived without magic for the first eleven years of my life. If I have to give it up to be here with my family, then it will be worth it."

"I admire what you are saying, son," Thomas said, "You are one of the three most powerful wizards alive in Europe today. Probably in the top five in the world. Can you really give that up?"

James smiled at his grandfather. He was not offended by the question because he understood where it came from. "All I ever wanted was a family. Even after I learned of magic I looked in the Mirror of Erised and saw me with my parents. They were my only image of a family. Now I have a better one than I knew to dream of then."

Sarah snuggled into James's shoulder without saying another word. After a short pause the conversation changed to more comfortable topics. Sarah just sat staring into the fireplace.

ADAD

The next morning James and Sarah sat around the breakfast table eating in a comfortable silence. Tom left the previous evening to return to Hogwarts. His weekend homework had been left behind and needed to be completed before classes. The younger Evans children were still asleep.

Sarah sipped her tea. She set her cup down and looked at her husband. "James, I think we should talk about the potion."

"What do you mean?" James asked.

Sarah shifted uncomfortably. "Have you really thought about what taking the potion could mean? The risks involved in using it?"

James reached over the table to take her hand. "I have no intention in leaving you or the children. You need me here too much. The kids need me here. This is my family."

"Losing your magic could be a lot worse than you seem to believe. It would be a huge shock to your system. My research says it could be very bad."

"How bad?" James asked.

"Very bad. I talked to a couple of the senior Healers at St. Mungos. I didn't give them any details, but I asked about the effects of losing one's magic. Healer Greenleaf said your age and magical power will be a key factor. Being young will help, but your core is so large it may be a large problem." Sarah looked at the table and quietly said, "You could die from the shock."

"What are the chances of that happening?"

Sarah shrugged unhappily. "He didn't know. No one knows. No one has done tests for this kind of thing."

James sat quietly for a couple of minutes. He absently sipped his tea. "I'd rather take the chance to be here for the family than be safe in my own time. I want to watch my children grow up."

“Think carefully on this,” Sarah urged. “The potion is finished. I put the potion on the shelf in my lab. It will be good for another two days. Please think about it before you make your decision. We would love to have you here with us, but knowing you will lose your magic and could die makes it hard. If you go back to your time, we know we will have you then.”

“I have thought about this,” James said in a quiet voice. “I have a responsibility here. This is where I belong.”

Nothing more was said. Five minutes later, Katie and Michael arrived in the kitchen in full volume calling for breakfast. Sarah left to get the younger twins out of bed while Cillie came in to start cooking. Once the children were settled, James left for Hogwarts.

After the morning settled down, Sarah left the children with Cillie and walked down to her lab. Sitting on the end of the bench Sarah found the potions flask she had marked for James. It was empty.

7 December 1941

One month after the attack on the Phoenix school, the war took an unexpected turn. Muggle Germany's ally, Japan, attacked the United States at their Pacific fleet base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Japanese did not have a Grindelwald style Dark Lord or Lady. (Several Dark wizards and witches contended for the position, but they were more interested in internal issues than fighting with “gaijin” wizards.) The Empire of Japan fought the war solely as a Muggle endeavor.

With the war in the Pacific being fought entirely as a Muggle issue, it was a great surprise when Grindelwald declared war against the magical United States at the same time Hitler declared war against the Muggle Americans on 11th of December . The move came as a shock to the British wizards and their allies.

The Muggle Germans had been stopped in their attack on Moscow and a Soviet counteroffensive was underway. Hitler called on Grindelwald's support in helping the Nazi units fighting in Russia. The Ministries encompassed by the Soviet Union remained as separate, independent magical states rather than forming one larger

organization to match the Muggle communist government. In general, each Soviet Republic maintained its own magical government. Their areas of influence matched the Muggles with only some minor variations. These Ministries maintained their historical sovereignty and grudges even in the face of the advancing Nazis. Only Grindelwald's move to support the floundering Nazi armies forced them to work together.

In the end, the German magical escalation on the eastern front gained them nothing. Grindelwald's magical forces outclassed their opponents, but the defenders had larger numbers and only one front, while Germany had two magical fronts. The two magical forces effectively cancelled each other out leaving the Muggle forces to fight their war undisturbed.

Now, with the declaration of war on the magical government of the United States, Grindelwald was adding a large number of opponents to join the magical British and their allies on the western front. Intelligence reported a rumor in magical Berlin that Hitler promised Grindelwald control of California after an Axis victory. (The report said Grindelwald's research indicated the boundary between this world and the demonic realm was thinner in southern California.)

The United States consisted of about the same number of total wizards as in Britain but with a much larger Muggle population. Not too many scions of the Pureblood families immigrated to the colonies. Most who did emigrate from Europe were younger sons and daughters with little chance of inheritance or the odd scholar who chafed at Ministry guidelines. As a result most of the European-heritage American magical community was of recent Muggle-born decent. The oldest American "Pureblood" families were at best five generations from Muggle roots. By British and European standards, few of them would be able to truly claim "Half-blood" status. The "Father of American Magic", Benjamin Franklin, was a Muggle-born.

(The United States did in fact have a second large and established magical government operating within its Muggle boundaries. These were the traditional Native American spellcasters. Although the two wizarding populations never fought like their Muggle counterparts, the native magical population withdrew into protected enclaves as

European Muggle colonists pushed westward. Using their own rich magical heritage, they caused their enclaves to appear as wastelands to Muggles. Their largest enclave was in a lush river valley that Muggles called Death Valley. However, the native magical population did not care about Grindelwald and maintained strict neutrality.)

While much of the wizarding population of Europe looked down on the small American magical population as a collection of Mudbloods, the additional resources they provided in manpower for the war effort and supplies for the magical refugees would be welcome.

31 December 1941 – Somewhere outside Liverpool

“Milord.”

“Christina, I am most disappointed in your failure to find one boy.”

Christina bowed her head in shame. “I apologize, my lord. We have failed to locate the boy. The blood confirms the boy we targeted was not the one we wanted. The Aurors have been blocking our efforts. We have lost the element of surprise.”

Grindelwald nodded in his mirror. “The Count’s comments to our servant tell us their Ministry knows we are looking for the Slytherin heir.”

“Yes, milord,” Christina acknowledged. “They have tightened up security precautions throughout England.”

“Hmm, be sure to watch what they don’t make a show of increasing security on. Has our spy found anything for us?”

Christina shook her head in the negative. “No, milord. Nothing of any real use. How long must we deal with this fool? His insistent whining about the ‘nobility of his bloodline’ and what is ‘beneath’ him make me itch to use the Killing Curse.”

The Dark Lord laughed in amusement. “Patience. He is not our only source in England, but he is the highest ranking one right now.” Setting the traitor Black aside, Grindelwald asked, “Have they come any closer to locating you?”

“A couple of Aurors came through last week, but it seemed to be a general patrol rather than anything specific. We keep no magic here save for this mirror,” the dark witch replied. “All of my team now have Muggle jobs. Several of them work building new Spitfires for the RAF.”

The Dark Lord smirked at the irony. “Adolf would be most upset with that news.”

Christina visibly steeled herself before asking, “Milord, why did you declare war on the Americans?”

The smirk changed into a small frown. “Don’t overreach yourself, my dear. My decisions are not for you to question.” When Christina made to apologize, the Dark Lord waved it away. “My agreement with the ‘kleiner Führer’ required me to act as I did. The fool grows more arrogant and unstable with each day.” The last was muttered almost under Grindelwald’s breath.

“Can we not replace him with one of our own?”

The wizard grunted, “I wish it could be that easy. Our agreement formed a magically binding contract. It is between him and me, not the Nazi party or even Germany in general. I have to support him in office. He was concerned about my supporting any possible rivals rather than a Polyjuiced replacement, but it stops me just the same.”

Christina bowed her head again, “I am sorry, milord. Forgive my suggestion.”

“No, it would be tempting but for that contract. I can’t even let someone else kill him for me.” The Dark Lord shrugged. “I want you to suspend all of your operations. Stay Muggle and under their scrying. In the confusion of the Americans arrival and with no new results, their attention shall turn elsewhere. They will assume you have left England. I will have someone substitute for you and be seen in public.”

“For how long, milord?”

“Until I tell you otherwise. Tell Black to stay away for now unless he uncovers something of extreme importance. At least you won’t have to deal with that fool.”

“Very well, milord.”

5 January 1942

Grimmauld Place

“That arrogant witch! How dare she send me such a command! I am a Black! We are the greatest Pureblood family in all of Europe!”

The note that caused Acturus Black’s rant lay discarded on the table.

Black-

Don’t contact us again until you have something worthwhile and proven to report. The debacle in Wales has caused too much trouble. All of our activities will be stopped until further notice. Find the kid.

-C

The note burst into flame five seconds after Black’s hand left it. A miniature whirlwind appeared over the ashes, spreading them as a fine dust that went unnoticed in the Black heir’s study.

Black stormed over to his office door in a rage. He threw the door open and screamed, “ORION!”

Almost instantly, the sound of running could be heard coming down the stairs. The Slytherin Second year flew into his father’s study. Orion had not even completely stopped before he was protesting his innocence.

“My trunk is already packed for school, sir. Mother will be taking me to the station...”

“I DON’T CARE ABOUT THAT, YOU LITTLE SHITE!” The elder Black delivered a backhanded smack to the boy’s head. The blow laid

him out on the floor. The boy Orion looked up at his father with fear in his eyes.

Black loomed over the small boy. "When you return to Hogwarts, you will watch the other students. You will find me the boy who is a Parselmouth. Then you will find out everything about them. You will tell no one about this. Am I clear?"

Orion cringed back, raising his arm in a futile effort to prevent any other blows from falling on him. In a pitiful voice, full of pain, he asked, "Tom? You're looking of Tom?"

"Tom?" Acturus Black reached down to yank the boy to his feet. "Tom who?"

"Tom Evans, sir. He is a Fourth year Slytherin. Everyone knows he is a Parselmouth. The snakes in the common room hiss to him all the time. The upper years are afraid of him. All of the magic in the Slytherin dorms obey him so they leave him alone. He is best mates with Minister Nott's son."

Acturus Black gave his son a warm smile. "Excellent, my boy. We'll make a true Black of you yet. Find out everything you can about young Mr. Evans. Make me proud boy and prove you belong in this family."

Orion stood in a curious position. His body language was both subservient and proud at the same time. "Yes, father. I will make you proud."

"Go. If you do well, I may reward you with the new broom you asked for."

"Thank you, father!" The boy turned and ran out of the room.

Acturus turned from the retreating boy and walked over to the mirror hanging on his wall. "Christina."

Two seconds later, Christina's image appeared in the mirror. "Black, you were told no communications..."

"I found the boy," he interrupted. "He is a Fourth year Slytherin named Tom Evans. His father is the do-gooder who owns the Phoenix Foundation."

"Evans? That is the second time in a month that name has come up," Christina mused. "Get all of the information you can about this Tom Evans and his father."

"I have already sent my son to gather information." Acturus glared at the image. "You will tell our Lord that I was the one to discover this information."

Christina gave him a gracious smile. "Of course, Acturus. I'm sure he will be pleased to reward you as you deserve. Gather the information, but don't do anything for now. The Aurors are too stirred up still. I will let the Dark Lord know of your progress."

Acturus turned from the mirror as the dark witch's image faded from the mirror. His moment of triumph was shattered by finding someone standing in his study door.

"What have you done, boy?" the figure hissed.

Acturus glared at the intruder. "I have done what you were too weak to do, old man. I will lead this family into its true position as the greatest family in magical Britain! Lord Grindelwald promised me to be his deputy in control of all of Britain! Every British witch and wizard will serve us!"

Sirus Black returned his son's glare. "The Blacks never serve anyone's cause but their own. We are subservient to no one! And we don't hurt our own family. I saw the mark you placed on your own son."

"He must learn, old man. Times are changing and your time has passed."

The Black patriarch growled at his son. "So you think the quick path of kissing a Dark Lord's robes is better than the Black path of subtle actions from the shadows. Dark Lords rise and fall. The Black Family

remains. I will not allow you to betray all this family has worked for in your petty games.” He turned to leave the room.

As the old wizard left the room, he heard his son mutter, “*Snuffus*.”

The old man’s hands went immediately to his throat. He could not breathe or make a sound. Extreme pain shot through his body as oxygen deprivation set in. Sirius Black dropped to his knees as his vision started to dim. He tried to look for his son who was killing him. He never had the chance.

Acturus Black stepped over the body of his father. He had used an overcharged household charm in his murder of his own father. The Snuffing Charm was designed to put out candles and small fires by creating a small vacuum around the target. Not many thought about its application in murder, but unless the target was adept at silent magic and had their wand in hand they had no chance of resisting the spell. The spell was never used in combat as even the weakest shield could defeat it.

The murderer removed a small hard candy from a bowl. With a small banishing charm, the candy shot into his dead father’s open mouth and into his throat.

The new Patriarch of the Black Family turned without another glance to Floo St. Mungos to report his father’s accident. It was the first step in assuming his rightful role as the ruler of all Britain.

A/N: A shorter chapter than normal but it covered a bit of ground. At this point I think this story will end with about 40 chapters.

“gaijin” foreigner

1942

Jan 1, 1942 - Declaration of the United Nations signed by 26 Allied nations.

Jan 13, 1942 - Germans begin a U-boat offensive along east coast of USA.

Jan 20, 1942- Wannsee Conference to coordinate the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question."

Jan 26, 1942 - First American forces arrive in Great Britain.

April 23, 1942 - German air raids begin against cathedral cities in Britain.

May 26, 1942 - Rommel begins an offensive against the Gazala Line.

May 30, 1942 - First thousand bomber British air raid (against Cologne).

In June - Mass murder of Jews by gassing begins at Auschwitz.

June 25, 1942 - Eisenhower arrives in London.

July 3, 1942 - Germans take Sevastopol.

July 5, 1942 - Soviet resistance in the Crimea ends.

July 9, 1942 - Germans begin a drive toward Stalingrad in the USSR.

July 22, 1942 - First deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to concentration camps; Treblinka extermination camp opened.

Aug 7, 1942 - British General Bernard Montgomery takes command of Eighth Army in North Africa.

Aug 12, 1942 - Stalin and Churchill meet in Moscow.

Aug 17, 1942 - First all-American air attack in Europe.

Aug 23, 1942 - Massive German air raid on Stalingrad.

Sept 13, 1942 - Battle of Stalingrad begins.

Oct 5, 1942 - A German eyewitness observes SS mass murder.

Oct 18, 1942 - Hitler orders the execution of all captured British commandos.

Nov 11, 1942 - Germans and Italians invade unoccupied Vichy France.

Nov 19, 1942 - Soviet counter-offensive at Stalingrad begins.

Dec 16, 1942 - Soviets defeat Italian troops on the River Don in the USSR.

Dec 17, 1942 - British Foreign Secretary Eden tells the British House of Commons of mass executions of Jews by Nazis; U.S. declares those crimes will be avenged.

Chapter 29 – The Duel

9 April 1942 - Hogwarts

Tom leaned back against his chair and watched in great satisfaction as Nott's shield shattered under the onslaught of spells. The Fourth year Slytherin boy was forced into a purely defensive stance. Nott dodged the first three spells whilst trying to restore his shields.

He would not have that chance.

“Antiea Numinus!”

A brilliant purple spell caught the boy on his left thigh. He instantly dropped to the ground as he lost all feeling in his legs. Nott threw his hands out in a vain effort to catch himself before he hit the dueling floor. The young wizard did not realize his wand had been summoned away until he was already lying on the floor and wanted to neutralize the jinx. Realizing it was hopeless, Nott signaled his surrender.

The Dueling instructor walked over with a small smile on his face. He silently removed the jinx with just a gesture from his wand. “Well done, Mr. Nott. Your defenses are improving.” He helped the boy up and then turned to the other side of the mat.

“A most impressive victory, Ms. Parkinson. Using a Numbing Charm in a duel is an interesting idea. However, if Mr. Nott had been able to raise even the most basic shield it would have been blocked.”

“Yes, Professor Evans,” the witch acknowledged. “Or it could have hit him in the head and had no effect either.”

Tom called on his Occlumency training to keep from doubling over in laughter at Laura's comment. Nott looked torn as anger, embarrassment and guilt seemed to war across his face. Watching his best mate, Tom had to struggle harder to restrain his laughter.

Unfortunately for Nott, no one else in the class was currently undergoing training in the Mind Art. The Slytherin and Ravenclaw Fourth years seated around the dueling area made no effort to conceal their amusement at the spectacle that occurred before them.

With only a slight smile to indicate his amusement, James dismissed the class for the afternoon.

Nott accepted his wand back from his teacher and returned to his seat to collect his books. Tom watched him throw his book, quill and scrolls into the bag. Tom could see his friend wanted to explode but refused to do so in any kind of a public place.

“It would have been a better idea to have remembered her birthday, Romeo.”

Nott paused in his anger to glare at Tom. “Who?” Then he waved his question away. “Another of your Muggle references again. Yes, I know I should have remembered her birthday. But I had an Ancient Runes exam that day and we had Quidditch practice! It’s been two weeks! You would think she’d get over it.”

“Have you thought of apologizing?”

“I did! You were there at breakfast!”

Tom snorted. “Mate, you just said ‘Sorry, I had too much going on yesterday.’ You didn’t apologize, you gave her excuses.”

“Thanks for the advice from the Great Romancer! I noticed you have a problem stringing two coherent sentences together around Mary. Xurana seems to distract you a bit too. Worry about your own love life and stay out of mine!”

Tom watched his friend storm away with a look of bemusement on his face. He had never known Nott to explode that way. Normally his fellow Slytherin worked at maintaining the Slytherin ideal of projecting cool control and superiority. Now he seemed to be exploding like a Gryffindor.

The argument over Laura’s birthday was only the latest of the lovers’ spats. The Nott family was very traditional and enforced the traditional roles. Laura, however, wanted to continue studying to be a Healer after leaving Hogwarts. Amongst the Nott’s circle of Purebloods (including the Parkinsons), the wife should be a stay at home witch and concentrate on raising and educating the children.

Sarah Evans née Underhill came from a lesser level of Pureblood society. As a Pureblood witch working outside the home and married to a half-blood (no matter how wealthy and connected), Sarah was seen a just above the Weasley family in the social strata.

The loss of position in the view of the Pureblood Old Guard did not bother Laura any more than it bothered Sarah. Nott, however, feared his family's reaction if Laura continued in her effort.

Tom thought they were both being silly. They were both only fifteen! They acted like they would be getting married.

"Ah, young love."

Tom turned to face his professor. "Were you any better?"

"In Fourth year? Nope. Girls scared the magic out of me. I was too busy with the Tri-Wizard Tournament and sulking on how unfair life was to really notice the witches around me. That didn't start till my Fifth year." James paused for a moment thinking about his disastrous date with Cho Chang. "I was rubbish with the whole dating thing. Dark Lords I could handle, not teenage witches."

Tom considered his father. James Evans did not normally talk this openly about his experiences in the future except for his fights with Voldemort and Quidditch. "What about the girl you were in love with when you fought Voldemort?"

James smiled without really looking at his son. "I would have died for her. If she had lived I suppose we would have married. I imagine it would have been a very different being married to Ginny. Much louder. Your mum keeps me grounded."

"How are you doing, dad?"

James smiled. Ever since drinking the potion, Sarah and Tom had been ever so careful around him. "I am fine, Tom. My magic is still with me for now. I have another two to four years before that damn Time Turner activates and takes my magic with it." The older wizard shrugged, "That means I have a couple years to get you trained up to protect the family when I can't."

Tom looked a bit nervous at that idea. “Dad, I can’t fight like you.”

“Tom, if anyone knows what you are capable of, it is me. Remember, fighting Voldemort and all.”

“But you said he used all kinds of Dark Rituals to increase his power!”

James nodded, “He did, but most of those were directed at achieving his immortality. He was more powerful than me when we fought in terms of raw magic.”

“So if he was more powerful than you, and I don’t plan on using those rituals, then how am I supposed to replace you?”

A frown answered that question. “No one is asking you to ‘replace’ me. After all, I will still be around. I beat Voldemort because of constant training and his arrogance. I also have a large reserve of magic that is emotionally triggered. Anger over Ginny’s death allowed me to blast that bastard to Hell.

Tom, you are much better at understanding the theory behind magic than I will ever be. I had to use Hermione for that kind of stuff. I am very good at the practical use of magic for fighting, but Arthimacy and Runes make my head hurt. Both classes I believe you currently have O’s in. Even without the rituals, you will be the most powerful British wizard coming out of Hogwarts since Dumbledore. I know you will do great things with your life.”

Tom sighed. “Okay, Dad. But you are giving me a large cauldron to fill.” James simply laughed.

A couple minutes later the two Evans men walked out of the Dueling classroom together. As they walked out Tom asked, “So, any magic I can use to help Nott?”

James snorted, “Some things even magic can’t help.”

11 April 1942

The Slytherin Common Room had changed a great deal in the last three years. It was not so much the décor or anything physical. Much

of the furniture remained the same. The difference lay in the atmosphere of the room. Friendly laughter could now be heard here. The room seemed brighter in some indescribable way.

The source of that change was gathered in their traditional place in the common room. Most of the Slytherin Fourth years sat gathered around the table working on their various assignments. The only Slytherin Fourth years absent were Antonin Dolohov and Skullion Mulciber. A fair sized chunk of the younger years sat in their immediate area.

The older Slytherin students generally ignored the younger students. The Fifth and Seventh years were preparing for the OWLS and NEWTS. The Sixth year students did not have major exams but most still had several end of the year exams in their NEWT classes.

Slytherin House was a house divided.

The House traditionally thrived on terrorizing the younger students. This was done to 'toughen' them up. The older students looked forward to destroying the young students. Since their tormentors were beyond their reach, the younger students would have to suffice.

But Tom changed that dynamic. By gathering the majority of the Fourth year students around him, and then the younger years, Tom made a power block that the older students were reluctant to cross. Tom prevented the older students from their bullying ways. It was a classic case of quantity over quality. More than half of the Slytherin students aligned themselves behind Tom. Even some of the Fifth and Sixth year students supported his effort.

This is not to say life in Slytherin House became light and airy. At their core, the majority of Slytherins lack the basic loyalty one would see in a Hufflepuff. Most of the students truly saw joining Tom as aligning themselves with a powerful wizard who could protect them and help them get ahead in the future. Tom was okay with that as long as it helped him in his long-term goal of redeeming the Slytherin name.

Tom sat at the table working on his Transfiguration essay for Dumbledore. The professor required a three scroll essay on the

hazards of using conjuring as opposed to normal transfiguration for everyday use. With a final flourish, Tom completed the assignment.

“Have you finished your Potions homework, Tom?” Mary asked.

“Er, sure. Here it is. I finished all of my assignments.” Tom handed Mary the requested scroll.

Nott looked up from where he was working on the other side of the table. “Want to walk down to the kitchens to get a snack, Tom? I could use the break.”

It was the first time since the Dueling class that Nott had spoken directly to Tom. “Sure, I could use a bit of leg stretching.” The other Slytherins at the table exchanged glances but no one commented as the two friends walked out of the dungeon.

Once past the portal Nott placed his hand on Tom’s shoulder. “I wanted to apologize for being a huge prat for the last week.”

Tom grinned, “I understand. Your brain turned to mush around Laura.”

Nott groaned, “It not just that.”

Tom did not say anything. He waited patiently as the pair walked towards the kitchens. After two minutes of silence, his patience was rewarded.

“Over the holidays Laura and her parents came to my house. Our parents have known each other for years. It was...nice. But then I got an owl from my Dad two weeks ago. Apparently our fathers have already planned out a match and are talking about the ‘alliance of our two ancient and noble houses’. According to the letter, our mothers have already started talking about the wedding plans!”

Tom stopped in shock at his friend’s comments. “Are you saying your parents are arranging your marriage? You’re fifteen for Merlin’s sake!”

"Tell me about it," Nott grumped. "Dad says it will help me advance within the Ministry after school. Mr. Parkinson owns a big share of the Wizarding Wireless Network. He is also big into potions ingredients but the WWN is the big thing."

"So you only like Laura for the WWN access she could get you?" Tom asked carefully.

"NO! That's my father's goal, not mine. I like her a lot, but I don't really want to be worried about being promised to someone either."

Tom shook his head. "I'm missing something here. Can't you tell them to wait a bit, or just say no?"

"It's Pureblood tradition. Not many use it anymore except the highborn Purebloods but a stronger tradition remains not to go against the express wishes of the family patriarch."

As they walked into the kitchens, Tom asked, "Have you talked to Laura about this?"

"Oh that would be bloody brilliant!" Nott snapped. "Hi Laura, I like you a lot but I don't want to get married to you or use you for WWN access! I'm sure that would go over real well."

"Well, start with the last part and go from there. So you are ignoring Laura because you are embarrassed your parents are forcing you into a relationship you wanted anyway. Laura thinks you just want her connections and is also angry you are ignoring her. Which ignoring her just confirms to her you only want her for her connections. Good job, mate." Tom turned from his volcanic friend to face the house-elf that appeared in front of him. "Hello, Tweaky!"

"Greetings Master Evans, are we going to do more pranking? We's getting bored waiting for some messes. All the students be studying!"

Tom laughed. "Not right now. Could you make up a couple trays of snacks and bring them to our common room? I'll stop by later to discuss some ideas I have."

Tweaky nodded happily. "We's can be doing that!" In a blink, Tweaky disappeared to fulfill the request.

"He is a helpful bugger," Nott commented whilst trying to control his anger at his friend.

"True," Tom agreed. While Nott was watching the elves, Tom drew his wand. "*Stupefy!*" Nott slumped bonelessly to the floor.

Three minutes later Tom was whistling to himself as he walked back to the Slytherin common room. Nott's unconscious body floated along behind him.

"Mr. Evans, what are you doing with Mr. Nott?"

Tom turned to his Transfiguration professor with a happy grin. "Hello professor. I am just trying to get a bit of sense into my friend here."

"Hm. He seems a bit senseless to me right now."

"It's only temporary, professor," Tom assured him.

Professor Dumbledore pulled a small tin out from his robe. "Lemon drop?" Tom accepted one. Then the professor asked, "May I ask what you planned on doing?"

"The basic plan is to stun the pair of them, take their wands, and drop them in a broom closet until they kiss and make up. I'll charm the door to stay locked until they talk it out."

Dumbledore's eyes were twinkling in his amusement. "May I ask why you are taking such drastic action, Mr. Evans?"

"We only have a few weeks left in the term," Tom explained. "If this drags out into the holidays, it will go till school starts again in September. The rest of us would have to listen to these two moan about each other. This way they'll either make up or kill each other!"

"Hopefully the former," Dumbledore commented in dry amusement. "Carry on, Mr. Evans."

“Thank you, sir!”

The Slytherins were enjoying Tweaky’s deliveries when Tom returned to the dungeon. Neither Tom nor Nott’s floating body were noticed as they walked into the common room.

“*Stupefy!*”

“Thomas Evans, what do you think you are doing?!” Mary yelled as Laura slumped to the floor.

Tom shrugged, “Getting the summer angst out of the way?” With a muttered spell, Tom summoned both of their wands. Then he floated both of their bodies into a convenient closet in the Slytherin potions lab. The majority of the house followed along, even the older students. This seemed like an amusing study break.

Once their bodies were positioned in nicely compromising positions, Tom asked Mary to place a couple sandwiches and a pitcher of pumpkin juice in the closet with them. Tom scribbled a note and left it with the food. Xurana charmed the doorknob to glow so they would have some light. Two quick Enervates and the door was closed.

The whole of Slytherin House waited through a minute of silence then they could hear yelling and pounding on the door coming from the closet. Tom cast a Silencing Charm on the door.

Tom turned to the assembled Slytherins. “It is now 3:00 on Saturday. One galleon a bet. How long will they be in there?” The students started laughing and calling out times and dates to the young Prank Lord.

12 April 1942

Tom looked out over the lake whilst leaning against a tree. The overlook provided a great view of the lake and the Forbidden Forest beyond. Tom enjoyed the time alone to just simply relax.

“Are you hiding out?”

Tom turned to the source of the sweet, pleasant voice. "Not yet, they haven't gotten out of the closet yet."

"That makes me a bit suspicious. It has been almost twenty-four hours."

"Well, no one is dead. The door is charmed to open if either of them is seriously hurt. So either they are being really stubborn or...something else. Personally, I suspect a lot of snogging is going on."

Andrea settled onto the ground next to Tom with a giggle. "I think you are right. I am glad you did this. Laura invited me to spend the summer at her house. I think it will be easier to live with an in-love Laura than a broken hearted one."

Tom grinned at the part-Veela. "I had the same concern with Nott."

"So, when are you going to finally ask Mary out?"

Tom cursed as he felt his face blush. "What do you mean?"

The French witch giggled. "Tom, I am a half-Veela remember? The only boys around here who don't make fools over themselves over me are the ones in love, and you. Since I got here my powers have had no effect on you. Actually it is rather nice to have one male friend whose brain doesn't turn to mush around me."

"So you think that means I'm in love?" Tom laughed.

"Maybe you just do not wish to admit it to yourself," Andrea pouted. "You are always with Mary and I have seen how she looks at you. Xurana looks too but she looks more like my cat when she is stalking a garden gnome."

Tom snorted at the image of a gnome-sized Tom running from a Xurana faced cat. It sounded like one of the Muggle cartoons from the cinemas. Andrea started laughing when Tom shared the image with her.

"And who is the Goddess of Lefay House chasing after?"

“Well, I am not much interested in little boys,” she answered in a haughty tone. “One of the professors may be acceptable but he has proven most resistant to my charms. It is too bad as he had the most amazing green eyes.”

“Oi, that’s just wrong!” Tom tried to act outraged as Andrea started to laugh. “That is my father you are talking about!”

“Maybe it is just the eyes,” Andrea giggled. “Michael and Ron are the cutest little boys and they have the eyes too.”

Tom just hung his head and laughed at the witch’s comments. After a bit the two just sat in a comfortable silence.

Unfortunately, their moment of peace and amusement was not meant to last.

“Get away from my cousin, Evans” a growled voice demanded.

Tom turned to see Alajos Sardonnos stomping up the path towards where the two students sat. “Hi, Al. What’s up?”

“Don’t call me that! I am Alajos Sardonnos of the Ancient and Noble Family of Sardonnos! You are nothing more than a trumped up Half-blood want-to-be aping the manners of your betters! Now, get away from my cousin for the last time! I will not have her contaminated with your filth!” Alajos sneered at Tom like his was muck to be scrapped of the bottom of his boot.

Tom turned to Andrea. “Do people really talk like that?”

“Come, Andrea!” Alajos demanded in an imperious voice. “If you must lower yourself to be among these weak British wizards at least do it from amongst our own class!” Then with another sneer aimed at Tom, “Or at least as close to our class as these idiots are capable of!”

“And what types do you think are acceptable, Alajos?” Andrea asked in a cold voice.

“Dolohov and Mulciber have the proper disposition for being acceptable acquaintances if you must spend time with the British.

They understand their place in the society. The older Slytherins are generally acceptable, but this one has ruined the younger years.” The last comment was directed at Tom with another sneer. Tom ideally wondered if the boy practiced sneering in front of a mirror.

“Have those two decided to kiss your arse now?” Tom asked. “Merlin knows that have tried to use everyone else around school they think will help them out.”

“You mean like you use your toady to hide behind his father?”

Andrea rose quickly to her feet and grabbed Tom’s arm. “Come on, Tom. Let’s go back to your common room.”

Tom slowly rose to his feet and glared at the French boy. “You are not the lord of the manor here, you spoiled little brat.”

Andrea’s hand squeezed Tom’s arm in sudden panic. “Dolohov and Mulciber are coming up the path behind us!” she hissed.

Alajos obviously noted the approach of his two ‘friends’ by the smirk he threw at Tom. “Oh dear, Evans. You seem to be in a bit of a problem.”

Tom’s wand dropped into his hand from the holster in normally occupied on his forearm. With his free arm, Tom gently moved Andrea to stand directly behind him. He could still not see Alajos and the approaching Slytherins at the same time without turning his head, but it was better than nothing.

“Alajos, stop this foolishness at once!” Andrea yelled at her cousin.

Tom was thinking furiously about his father’s training. Tactically the situation was not too good. Three opponents approaching from almost opposing sides meant Tom could not watch them all. He sensed more than felt Andrea draw her wand.

“Can you hit those two cretins with your Veela power?”

“Maybe,” she answered. “But Alajos is blood related to me. It will not affect him.”

“Brilliant,” Tom muttered thinking fast. “Alajos, back off. If you start throwing spells you could get expelled.”

“But I will have witnesses backing me up that you cast the first spell, Half-blood. Members of your own House. You’ll be the one on the way home.”

Tom did not think that the charge would really hold. Andrea would support him and Professors Evans and Dumbledore would help him. Professor Slughorn would probably back him too, out of House loyalty if nothing else. But the French Minister of Magic would raise a big stink and the British Minister of Magic might not be too happy either if Nott was still stuck in that closet.

Tom turned his glare on the French wizard. “Alajos Sardonnnes, I challenge you to a duel. If you want a fight we’ll do it in front of the whole school. You talk big. Prove your claims of superiority or admit your fear of a mere half-blood.”

Andrea inhaled in shock as Alajos paled at Tom’s words. Dolohov and Mulciber looked uncertain as they looked back and forth between the other two boys.

“You want to challenge me? Fine, midnight in the Trophy Room.”

Tom laughed. “I said in front of the school, you twit. Face me in a proper duel or leave us alone. Your choice.” Tom continued to glare at his possible opponent whilst awaiting his response.

“Fine! I will face you in your little duel. Let the whole school see your humiliation. Your professor father will not be able to help you.”

Tom affected a bored tone. “Who is your Second?”

Sardonnnes glanced briefly at his two Slytherin accomplices. “Mr. Albert Lapent of Richelieu House will have that honor.”

Tom suppressed a snort. They sounded like a school presentation of The Count of Monte Cristo. “I will have Mr. Nott speak to him after arranging the use of the school dueling salon. Good day.”

Tom took Andrea's hand and started to lead her past the two Slytherins. When they moved to block Tom's path, Tom paused two steps away. Without turning to face his future opponent, Tom said, "By the terms of the Magical Dueling Code, neither the combatants nor any working on their behalf may meet in conflict until the duel is held. Tell your lackeys to move."

Without waiting for Alajos to reply, Tom resumed walking as the two Slytherins parted from in front of them. Without glancing back, Tom and Andrea walked back to the school.

Once they were out of earshot, Andrea hissed in Tom's ear, "Are you crazy? Why did you challenge him to a duel?!"

Gritting his teeth, Tom answered, "Those three were not letting us leave without a fight."

"I could have just gone with them!"

"Did you really want to?" Tom asked rhetorically. "Even if you left with your cousin, the other two would have started hexing. If you stayed, we would have been caught in their crossfire. I gave Alajos a one in three chance of being smart enough to walk away from my challenge."

"But what are you going to do now? He accepted it!"

Tom shrugged, "I figure I still win. Rather than a two against three fight on bad ground, I now have a one on one on equal ground."

When the veela witch made a growl of disgust, Tom glanced at her curiously. "Why are you so angry at me?"

In a low, dangerous tone Andrea answered, "Because I wanted to curse them myself. How dare he try to tell me who I can be friends with?!" The young witch started to rant on the arrogance of her cousin and males in general.

Tom just chuckled to himself listening to her rant. The sound of him laughing caused her to pause in mid-rant.

"I have never had a boy fight for the honor of being near me before. Well, at least not in the last two years. But that was just a silly little fist fight in Second year."

"What?!" Tom jaw hit the ground. "That's not what we are dueling over!"

Andrea acted like she hadn't heard him. Instead, she wrapped herself around his arm. In a vapid, breathless voice she said, "I do hope that Mary and Ela won't be too jealous."

"Mary... and Ela? Jealous?" Tom repeated in a sick voice. "Why would Ela be jealous? I'm not dating Ela."

"You're not dating Mary either...yet." Andrea did not give Tom a chance to answer as she topics. "Of course Ela will be jealous. She'll think I am jumping line. She's just waiting since Mary has seniority."

Tom let out a groan. To which Andrea just laughed.

In her normal voice, Andrea said, "There reactions are going to be interesting. But not as interesting as Professor Evans, no?"

19 April 1942

Over the next week, Hogwarts churned in chaos. Headmaster Dippet attempted to prevent the duel, but the old Pureblood forms had been followed in the issuance and acceptance of the challenge. Under the ancient codes of Duellus Magicus, the two fifteen year olds were old enough to be considered adults. Neither British nor French magical law ever modified the two thousand year old code due to the resistance of the Pureblood conservatives.

Faced with a situation he could not prevent, the Headmaster placed certain provisions in place to allow the school to control the circumstances of the duel such as where and when it would be held. Professor Flitwick was invaluable as a former professional Dueler for navigating the requirements of the magical dueling code.

The Dueling classroom was packed with people. The Ministers of Magic from both Britain and France sat on either side of the dueling

platform. Their respective entourages consumed over a quarter of the spectator seats. The rest of the seats were occupied by Hogwarts students. So many students wished to attend the duel that Headmaster Dippet was forced to hold drawings for seats.

A large contingent of Slytherin students occupied a section of the seats. They were joined by Ela, Janek and Andrea. Tom also recognized Amelia Bones and Hagrid from Gryffindor to name a few.

Tom and Alajos were both popular students within the halls of Hogwarts. No one in any of the Houses wanted to miss this duel. The two Fourth years were very different wizards but both were leaving a mark on Hogwarts.

Tom was known as a charismatic younger student that excelled at both academics and Quidditch. In three years on the Slytherin Quidditch team, Tom had lost the snitch only four times. This led the Slytherins to owning the Quidditch Cup last year and placing second the other two years. All this while maintaining an almost perfect O average.

Alajos Sardannes was not a star athlete, nor was he a great student. Oddly enough for a Pureblood, Alajos preferred to play on the rugby pitch then fly on a broomstick. He was an A or EE student, but did not put in the time or effort to receive top marks. However, Alajos maintained an almost mystical aura that led the majority of the student body to accept his lead. At first Tom wondered if it was related to the sexual aura a female Veela like Andrea projected. Alajos was a very easy wizard to get along with as long as one accepted his social superiority

Unfortunately, this was something Tom could simply not do. It was the age old clash of the aristocrat and the republican.

Tom and Nott did a bit of testing at the start of Fourth year. They discovered no sign of any magic that would affect people's minds in any way coming from the Richelieu wizard. Tom discussed it with his father and realized it was simply a sense of confidence and training that did not quite cross the border into simple arrogance. In simple terms, Alajos Sardannes was the ideal that a later Draco Malfoy would try, and utterly fail, to emulate.

Tom walked out to the dueling platform followed by Nott. The seating area around the dueling platform had been magically expanded to allow more observers than normal. A low buzz filled the room as the two wizards walked into the room. Tom walked over to the stool at the end of the platform.

As Tom sat down, Nott kneeled on one knee next to him. He leaned in to whisper into Tom's ear. "If you hadn't locked me in that bloody closet none of this would be happening."

Tom could not suppress a smirk. "If I hadn't locked you in that bloody closet you and Laura would still be driving the rest of us spare!"

Nott only answered that with a snort. "You remembered to leave your second wand behind? This is an official duel. Those are against the rules."

"Yes, I left it behind."

"Familiars? I know Snuffles is in the dorm. Where is Nagini?"

"With Snuffles. I can't believe you let them put that clause into the rules."

That earned another snort. "Maybe you shouldn't be so known for having a pet cobra?"

Tom grimaced, "I couldn't have used it anyway. I have to hide the whole Parselmouth thing, remember? There is no way those Dark Army creeps wouldn't hear about it if I used it today." Tom motioned with his chin. "I never expected the Daily Prophet to send a reporter for a school duel."

"You have both Ministers of Magic sitting in this room. The US Secretary of Magic and the Russian Duke of Magic are arriving in two day, but both of them took the time to come here today. That makes it news," Nott explained.

Tom sighed. "Great, now Dad is really going to lock me in the house all summer."

Nott shrugged, "Tell him you are hiding in plain sight. No one would expect someone supposed to be hiding with landing themselves on the front page of the Prophet three times in a week. Four if you include the one I sure will be on tomorrow's paper."

The conversation paused as Professor Evans entered the room and walked over to his son. Tom straightened up a bit on his stool.

James stopped in front of his son. Tom recognized the lack of expression signaled his father was using Occlumency to keep control on his emotions. "Your opponent will be coming out shortly. Ruslan Tarasov will be refereeing the duel. He is an Auror for the Magical Duke. Before the war he was a well-known duelist."

"I thought Professor Flitwick was overseeing the duel," Nott commented.

A slight frown crossed James Evans's face. "He was but some felt he would be biased for Tom even though both boys are students here. Flitwick knew Tarasov on the Dueling Circuit and says he is an honorable opponent. He'll be a fair judge."

"Dad," Tom started, "I'm sorry about all of this. I thought..."

James interrupted him. "Concentrate on what you have to do now. We'll worry about what happens next later." A small grin crept onto James's face. "Just be glad I convinced your mother to stay at home with the little ones."

Tom's attention was diverted to where his opponent was entering the dueling salon. "Five knuts she is already waiting in the Hospital Wing with Madam O'Niel."

Alajos Sardonnés walked with an arrogant strut into the crowded room trailed by a rather large Seventh year wizard. After the challenge, Tom learned Albert Lapent was the Beauxbatons's Dueling Champion before the evacuation to Hogwarts. A most remarkable feat since he had only been a Fifth year student at the time. He also was Sardonnés's cousin on the opposite side from Andrea.

A tall, blond haired wizard entered the salon in the traditional white robes of the Dueling judge. Although standing just under six and a half feet tall, the man moved with a natural grace like he was constantly dancing. He moved to the center of the Dueling mat and stood patiently.

“Merlin,” Nott breathed, “I’d love to see him and Flitwick dueling. If just for the visual picture.”

James chuckled, “Professor Flitwick mentioned their duels were always a crowd favorite. Your Charms professor is an excellent opponent. He uses his size to his advantage in remarkable ways.”

“Gentlemen, please assume your places,” the Russian wizard called from the center of the mat.

“Good luck,” Nott whispered as he and James moved off the mat.

Tom barely heard him as he approached his position on the platform. Sardonnnes strutted into his position with a cocky air like the results of the match were a foregone conclusion.

“Arrogant git,” Tom muttered.

Once the two duelers faced each other, Auror Tarasov stepped next to him. In a light Russian accent, the wizard asked, “Are you to committed to this duel?” The duelers observed each other as they nodded. “Then I want a clean duel. You both signed the rules. No Unforgivables and nothing that can do serious or lasting harm.” Again they both nodded. “Then move to your positions and prepare yourselves.”

Tom moved to his indicated spot. His wand dropped into his hand from its holster as he took a deep breath.

Sardonnnes called out from his position. “You can stop this now, Evans. Apologize, concede to my demands and I will let you go.” His voice contained a sneering arrogance. “One of your blood can not hope to stand against me.”

A low murmur rippled through the crowd, mostly of agreement. Tom's half-blood status was well known in the school. The Evans Family's adoption into the Potter clan alleviated some of the prejudices but 1940's England had a long way to go to reach even the tolerances of Harry Potter's Hogwarts.

Oddly enough to the watchers, Sardonnnes's comment brought a slight smirk to Tom's face and restored his color. 'I wonder what Grandpa Salazar would say to that?' he thought with a chuckle.

"Gentlewizards, ready?"

"Begin"

Tom drifted slightly to the left as Sardonnnes fired off several quick spells. Tom absently noted a Tickling Charm followed by two Disarming Charms. The spells passed closer than Tom felt comfortable with.

"*Corycus! Corycus!*"

Tom released two basic Punch Spells bracketed on either side of his opponent. The spells would do no real damage to Sardonnnes but even a decent hit could cause his shield to collapse.

Sardonnnes recognized the spells and dropped to the floor allowing them to pass harmlessly over his head. He glared at Tom from his inelegant position crouched on the platform. Tom just gave him a cheeky grin in return.

The young French wizard jumped to his feet and snapped off a quick "*Contra genu! Accio wand!*"

Keeping a tight grip on his wand, Tom dodged the Knee-Reversing Hex. Dad had hit him with that last summer and left him trying to walk around all day. Mum just smiled and claimed she couldn't cancel it.

The crowd roared their approval of the first several passes of spells. Many of the adults seemed to be supporting Sardonnnes while the students seemed split.

Tom decided to go for Sardonnnes's weakness.

"Relashio!"

The shower of sparks descended on Sardonnnes's shields. When the sparks struck the shield they created a series of flashing lights. The effect was like fifty flashbulbs triggering in rapid succession.

While Sardonnnes was temporarily blinded, Tom fired off another spell; one from his father's private arsenal.

"Pratus!"

Sardonnnes suddenly found himself hovering parallel to the ground. He seemed to hang there just long enough to get a clear view of Tom's grinning face before the ground suddenly rushed up to greet him. The impact momentarily knocked the wind out of him.

As Alajos scrambled to his feet, he noticed something was partially obstructing his view. Reaching onto his head, Sardonnnes grabbed the object, noticing it felt slightly slimy. He glanced at it for a split second before throwing it away. As he threw it he had to do a second glance to see if it was really what he thought it was.

A banana peel.

The Pureblood Alajos Sardonnnes never attended Muggle films. So the prat falls and physical humor of Charlie Chaplin and the Three Stooges was lost on him.

Tom gave into laughing with the crowd at the ridiculous figure Sardonnnes made holding the banana peel in his hand, his robes all disheveled from his fall.

Sardonnnes glared at the insult he heard in the laughter. Tom noticed a vein popping out on his neck.

"Impedimenta!"

The spell struck Tom's shields. The Protego held but barely. He could feel the spell push him back slightly. A little more power and his shields would not have held.

"Fucotig!"

Tom's answering spell caused Alajos to yell out as three fast moving objects passed through his shields to smash into his chest. They impacted with enough velocity that Tom knew they would leave welts behind. But the thing that really angered his opponent was the red, yellow and green paint that appeared on the front of the French wizard's robes.

The Paint Ball Charm conjured three fast moving globes of paint. As physical objects, they were not affected by the normal magical shields. James taught Tom the spell to help with his accuracy. It was also a lot of fun to shoot each other up.

"Sorry, Al. Didn't mean to mess up your robes! Here let me help! Aguamenti!"

A thick stream of water rocketed out of Tom's wand. The Muggle-born amongst the observers thought it looked like it was shot from a fire hose.

The water slammed into Sardannes's shields causing them to flair into visibility. Tom allowed a slight smile. The stream of water would drain Sardannes's magic as he kept it up and he had to drop the shield to fire a curse back.

Tom decided to end the duel before Sardannes could get a lucky curse in. He allowed his concentration on the Water Summoning Charm to release. But he quickly followed it up.

"Fridus."

The water pooled around Sardannes's feet froze instantly at the pale blue spell struck the floor two feet in front of the French wizard. A slick patch of ice formed, freezing the wizard's feet to the floor.

Sardennes was fighting to maintain his balance when the Disarming Charm smashed into him. The spell literally knocked the boy out of his shoes. He hit the platform with a wail of agony when his knee snapped under the strain for the body's momentum and the resistance of the frozen shoe.

Ruslan Tarasov stepped onto the platform and indicated that Tom was to step back. The Auror knelt down next to Sardennes for a moment before casting a spell on the boy's knee.

Standing, the Auror announced, "Mr. Sardennes has lost his wand and is physically incapable of continuing the duel. I declare Mr. Evans the winner."

Tom turned to smile at his father and Nott. Nott looked ecstatic with the win, while his father still looked concerned. Tom caught his father's eyes for a moment. James gave him a proud smile that also conveyed a sense of worry.

"Well done, young man."

Tom turned to find the French Minister of Magic standing behind him. The elder Sardennes was a tall, distinguished looking wizard with worry lines around his eyes and thick white patches in his otherwise dark hair.

"Thank you, sir. I hope Alajos is not severely injured."

The Minister waved the comment away. "No more than one should expect in a duel. Your spell choices were very unorthodox but I would say you were well trained."

Tom could not think of anything to really say. "Thank you again, sir."

"I hope this is the end of the matter between you and my son. Please understand Alajos feels most uncomfortable here in the United Kingdom. All his life has been in France. I fear his unease has translated into hostility directed at you."

Feeling a bit lost, Tom answered, "I do too, sir."

A hand grabbed Tom's shoulder as James stepped into his son's rescue. "Jean-Claude, it is nice to see you again."

The French Minister smiled in an easy fashion. "James, I can see your influence in your son's style. Most impressive. I quite liked the balls of paint. I was just saying to your son that I hoped this matter could be put to a rest."

James nodded his agreement. "I do as well. It is most disruptive in class."

"Indeed, I imagine it would be," the Minister agreed. A mischievous glint came to his eye. "Maybe we should lock them in a broom closet until they have resolved their differences?"

Nott started laughing as James snickered at the expression on Tom's face. 'How did the French Minister know about that?'

"I will excuse myself now. I would like to visit your hospital wing to ensure my son is well."

Tom starred after the retreating French Minister of Magic for a second. It only lasted a second because the tide of well-wishers, held back by the Minister's presence, swamped the Fourth year. A certain Slytherin Fourth year witch led the charge as she launched herself around Tom's neck. To his father and best mate's chuckles.

23 April 1942 – Somewhere outside Liverpool

The most wanted witch in England set down the couple days old copy of the Daily Prophet. Hiding as Muggles meant a regular delay in receiving news from the British magical world. Usually that was not too much of an issue for the witch but for the past week, it had been most vexing.

Christina knew about the upcoming duel. All of England knew about the duel. Knowing that your target is about to fight a duel can make an agent very nervous. Although it was not a fight to the death, accidents can and do happen. Her master would not be pleased if the Heir of Slytherin were lost to them.

As a servant of her master, the duel concerned her. But Christina saw herself as a fighter first not an agent. She had just finished rereading the spell by spell account of the duel and all of the other eyewitness reports. Now the dark witch was almost shivering with anticipation.

“Once he turns to my master’s service, I think this one will make a nice apprentice for myself. Nice flexibility and he can think on his feet. We’d just need to get him to drop those baby spells and use some real magic. Then he would be an asset to the master. He doesn’t seem to be the beast Morfin was either. Oh, this should be fun!”

A/N: I received quite a bit of email about the potion and James drinking it before the Time Turner was due to pull him back and its effect on his magic. I hope the conversation between James and Tom help to clarify things for all of you.

Chapter 30 – Fifth Year and OWLS

30 August 1942 – Evans House

“Concentrate on the image of yourself. Focus until you can see yourself clearly. Now, place the image of your animagus form next to it. Concentrate on the details. Get the image firm into your mind.”

Tom strained to follow the directions his father’s voice gave him. He sat on the floor of the dueling room of the Evans house with his eyes closed, concentrating on the images in his head.

Animagus training was the hardest magical training Tom had experienced so far. First he had to study advanced transfiguration theory that was actually above NEWT level. James also started Tom working on developing his meditation skills. James explained that meditation is required to achieve the animagus transfiguration.

“More people than you think are capable of learning this skill,” James explained to Tom. “However, most are unwilling to put in the time and effort of learning to meditate properly. Most texts tell us that less than one wizard in a thousand has the potential to be animagus. Today there are only five in all of Britain registered with the Ministry.

However, I know of six within the Department of Mysteries that are unregistered. Then there is the example of my father and his friends. What are the odds that three boys Sorted into the same House, in the same year, all have the ability to become animagi if the ‘one in a thousand’ rule applies? Of my two closest friends in school, two of us became animagi.” Tom paused as a smirk came to his face. “I think Ron could have too but he only liked to concentrate on food and Quidditch.”

The meditation also helped with the Occlumency training Tom was receiving.

Just before Tom’s Third year, James decided he was satisfied with Tom’s theoretical knowledge. Sarah brewed an Animagus Potion in her lab and insisted she be the one to give Tom the potion.

Just before Tom drank the potion, he asked, "Did Voldemort have an animagus form? I can't see him not being able to master this. What was his form? Will I have the same one?"

James had grinned at his son's nervous babble. "Consider this an experiment. If I told you anything it would ruin the experiment."

The results when Tom awoke from the potion caused James to roll on the floor laughing much to the confusion of his excited son and the disapproval of his wife.

Now, two years later, Tom was finally ready to make the final step. During those two years, Tom worked on his meditation. He also studied everything he could on his new form's habits, foods, physical characteristics and behaviors.

"Now, let the two forms merge in your mind as you release your magic into the image."

Tom felt his body become... liquid was the only way to describe it. He felt like he was being poured into a mold.

An instant later, it was over. Tom opened his eyes and looked around. The room seemed HUGE! Tom looked up at his father who was grinning in mixed pride and amusement. His new eyes brought everything into a greater focus than Tom could ever remember.

Tom took a couple tentative steps and found the movement felt natural. His tail balanced him as he moved slowly across the floor. Taking a last glance at his father, Tom darted out of the room.

"Tom, wait!" James cried out behind him.

Tom flashed down the hall and into the Living Room where both sets of twins were playing. Six year-old Katie sat with her back to the door as Tom entered the room. Feeling mischievous, Tom scurried up her shirt to sit on her shoulder. He chattered into her ear, causing the startled girl to let out a scream.

Chattering in laughter as his sister tried to move away, Tom dashed across the room to come to rest sitting in Ron's lap. The three year-old boy grinned at the creature in his lap and started to pet it.

James entered to room trying to look stern, but failed miserably. "Tom, you need to change back. You need to build up your time in your animagus form slowly."

With a slight nod, Tom darted off his brother's lap (much to Ron's disappointment) and onto the couch. The small creature concentrated for a moment and then was gone. A fifteen year-old boy sat in his place.

"That was so wicked!" the excited boy yelled out. James just grinned.

"Daddy, was that Tommy?" Katie demanded.

"Yes, dear. That was your brother."

Katie got up and kicked her older brother in the shin. "That was for scaring me!" Tom and James laughed at the expression on her face.

"What kind of an animal are you?" Michael asked smiling. He thought his big brother scaring Katie was funny. Katie kicking him was even funnier.

James answered for Tom. "He is an Indian mongoose."

Katie's expression changed to one of excitement. "You mean like Rikki-Tikki-Tavi?" she asked referring to the character from Rudyard Kipling's short story from "The Jungle Book"

Tom grinned, "Yep, just like Rikki-Tikki."

The twins went wild.

ADAD

After a short celebration with the four twins, Tom and James returned to the training room to discuss the change and how Tom felt. Now that the initial excitement had worn off, Tom felt magically exhausted.

“That is normal,” James commented. “The first change takes a large amount of effort. Each change will get easier until it is almost instantaneous and uses almost no magical energy.”

Tom slumped into a chair as James prepared him a restorative potion. “Dad, can you tell me Voldemort’s form now?”

James snickered. “There is a theory that one’s personality is matched to the animal you become. I’m not sure about my father becoming Prongs, but my godfather’s dog definitely fit him. Hermione’s cat fit her too. Voldemort had the perfect animal from his point of view, a king cobra.”

“A cobra?”

James shrugged. “The king cobra is not the deadliest snake in existence but it does capture a lot of public attention. It causes fear and intimidation.”

Tom considered that as James handed him the potion.

“In many ways, your animal shows how different you are from him. Where his form was venomous, yours is known for defending itself from those snakes with skill and speed. Think about that.”

“Nagini is not going to like this,” Tom smirked.

James sat down in a chair opposite Tom laughing. “Now I have to do something very important.”

“What’s that?” Tom asked.

James gave him a broad grin. “Give you a Marauder name, of course.”

1 September 1942 – Hogwarts Express

“Oh great prefect, I bow at your feet!”

“Worthless peasant! Clean my shoes!”

“Yes, master!” The kneeling boy drew his wand. With a muttered word and a gesture, a spell shot forth from the wand.

“I said clean them you dolt, not turn them into concrete!”

“Oops!”

The audience surrounding the two young wizards started to laugh at their antics. Tom laughed as he helped Nott up off the floor. Nott reversed his charm on Tom’s shoes and the two of them bowed to the others in their compartment.

Mary jumped up and wrapped her arms around Tom’s neck. “Congratulations on making prefect.” Then she leaned in to kiss him on the cheek. The pair started dating early in August when Tom invited her to dinner at the Evans house. The kisses and other affectionate displays Mary felt should accompany that change in status still caught Tom by surprise. He just gave her a stupid grin in response.

Tom blushed as Nott whistled at the two of them. “Is that proper Prefect behavior?”

Mary gave a lady-like sniff. “Is it? I think I see the girl in your lap wearing a Prefect pin too.” Laura grinned from her spot and exaggerated snuggling in.

“I thought Nott would be the Prefect in our year,” Xurana commented. “I figured Sluggo would try to curry favor with the Minister.”

Nott grimaced. “So did everyone else. I don’t want to succeed because of my father. I want to succeed in spite of my father. Besides, who could have a better claim within our House?”

The surrounding Fifth year Slytherins nodded at Nott’s statement. It made sense to them that the last living descendant of Salazar Slytherin had to be a Prefect within the House.

Evan Rosier looked at Nott curiously. “Didn’t your father get upset about it?”

“Surprisingly, no. He never mentioned anything about it.”

Tom knew the Minister was aware of his ancestry. The Minister was also a Slytherin so he possessed the same reasoning as the Fifth years. Personally, Tom considered the use of family history to determine precedence and leadership to be stupid. Would he be any different if they didn't know who his great-something grandfather had been? Being a Prefect did not seem to be such a great thing to Tom, but if he or Nott didn't accept it, it would end up with Dolohov. That would not be a good idea.

The train arrived in Hogsmeade exactly on time. The Fifth years started to disembark when they heard a commotion coming from the front of the train. The Slytherin Fifth years had taken a compartment towards the rear of the train. It was an unwritten rule that the Unsorted First years sat in the very front of the train while the rest of the train divided up by Houses. There were no hard boundaries between the sections of the train, just a tendency to group with students from your own House.

Mr. Ogg, the groundskeeper, had been calling the First years when the commotion started. Now he strode purposely by with the Gryffindor Sixth year prefect tagging along in his wake.

“Looks like McGonagall swallowed one of Professor Dumbledore's lemon candies,” Nott laughed.

“I wonder what the problem could be,” Tom innocently asked.

His girlfriend of a month didn't buy it. “What did you do?”

“What do you mean? Except for when I went to the loo, either you or Laura has been with me since we got on the train. How would I have done something all the way up there?”

Mary frowned. Tom's argument seemed true, but it seemed a little too pat.

Before Mary could ask anymore questions, Tom grabbed Amelia Bones as she walked past. “What is going on Amelia?”

The Gryffindor Fifth year witch was wearing a Prefect pin on her robes and a huge grin on her face. "Looks like the Revolution decided to kick off the year early. Someone charmed the door to the Prefects' Compartment. They can't open it. The Head Boy and Girl are both in there with all of the Seventh year prefects."

Tom acted surprised. "I thought they were all supposed to be patrolling the train the last part of the trip?" The Sixth years patrolled at the start of the trip, then the Fifth years after the Prefect meeting, with the Seventh years taking the last third of the trip.

Amelia snickered, "They never made it out after the Prefect meeting."

"So it happened right after the other Prefects left after the meeting?" Mary asked while looking at her boyfriend.

"No," Amelia replied. "It happened after the Fifth years finished their shift. I was in there after my shift finished. They got caught when they were supposed to be patrolling."

"Isn't that embarrassing for our new Heads," Tom commented mildly. Amelia just laughed and walked away.

Mary gave up trying to get Tom to confess as the group made their way to the waiting carriages. Several professors passed them on the way to the carriages. They all looked most concerned.

Tom smiled to himself. He wondered how long it would take them to realize that no magic was holding the door shut. He had shrunk a couple knuts and placed them under the door. When he cancelled the spell the knuts shoved the door up against the frame. Since there was no magic currently on the door, the frame or the knuts, a Finite spell would accomplish nothing.

As he climbed into the carriage, Tom glanced back at the train and the confusion going on behind them. Now a small smile crossed his face. It was amazing how fast and stealthy a mongoose could move from the loo to the Prefects' Compartment.

16 October 1942 – Hogwarts

An unseasonably warm Saturday broke over Hogwarts during the middle of October. Most of the student body moved their work and play outside to the grounds to take advantage of the weather. Nestled in the highlands of Scotland, one learnt to take full advantage of good weather whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Tom was sitting with Mary, Xurana and Andrea working on their Potions assignment. Potions was Tom's second favorite class (Defense against the Dark Arts was first), but even he was finding the Fifth year material challenging. It seemed all of the teachers were pushing as hard as possible to cram information into their brains before OWLS in the spring.

Mary sat leaning against Tom as he re-read the healing potion they would be brewing in Monday's class. Mary was working out the potential common causes and effects of misbrewing the potion. For the first time in his Hogwarts career Nott wasn't Tom's potions partner. Nott suggested they pair up with their respective girlfriends on the train. Tom agreed with hidden reluctance. Nott was a much better brewer than Mary.

Xurana and Andrea were partners for the first time also. The French veela witch refused to be partnered with any wizards. A couple wizards in the school, like Tom, could withstand the everyday effects of the veela's magic. However it always seemed to cause a problem with jealous witches. So Andrea always paired up with a number of witches in each of her classes.

"Cousin"

The group looked up to see Alajos Sardonnnes standing over them. Tom flexed his forearm slightly to reassure himself his wand was safely in his holster.

"Alajos," Andrea said in greeting. "How are you?"

"I am fine, thank you." The French wizard turned stiffly towards Tom. "I am here to present my apologies. My behavior last spring was most poor and not acceptable in a wizard of good breeding. Please forgive my rudeness."

Tom rose to his feet while watching the other wizard. Slowly he stuck his hand out. "I accept your apology."

Sardennes looked at Tom's offered hand for a moment before accepting it. "Thank you. Now I will not bother you any longer." With that, he turned and walked away from the small group.

"That was a good sign," Xurana commented.

"You think?" Tom asked dryly. "I was wondering who was applying the hot poker to his arse."

Xurana looked slightly scandalized. "Tom Evans, how can you say such a thing? The scion of the highest magical family of France just offered you his apology and you accepted it. You can't scoff at it now!"

"It didn't sound too sincere to me. Besides, he only apologized for being rude, not for trying to ambush me or anything else."

Before Xurana could respond, Andrea commented, "He is right, Xurana. Alajos only apologized for his rudeness. Tom is right to be wary of the apology."

Mary raised an eyebrow at Andrea's defense of Tom over her family member. When she challenged the French witch on it, Andrea merely shrugged, "Alajos is my cousin by birth, but Tom has become like my brother since we arrived here. Besides, he is the only wizard I can spend time with without their brains turning to mush."

"Because his brains are already mush," Mary smiled.

"Oi! I resemble that remark!" Mary just slapped his arm.

Xurana gave a disgusted huff and turned back to her assignment.

12 November 1942 – Hogwarts

"Mr. Evans, would you please remain after class?"

Tom looked up from placing his notes in his bag. "Yes, professor."

A low voice hummed in his ear. "Hmm, was someone a naughty boy?"

Tom grinned at his girlfriend. "Not me. I'm a sweet, innocent young wizard."

Mary gave Tom a sexy smile in return that caused his heart to beat a bit faster. "Too bad, I guess I'll have to find someone else to play with me."

Tom affected a hurt expression.

Mary looked momentarily startled until she noticed the glint in Tom's eye. "You prat! You are such a tease."

Tom laughed and threw her a wink. "I'll meet you at lunch. We can discuss my sweet innocence then."

With a flirty little wave, Mary walked out of the room to meet up with the other Slytherins while Tom walked to the front of the classroom.

"And how is the fifth floor broom closet, Mr. Evans?"

Tom turned a little pink. He stared at his professor for a moment. Then it hit him. "You saw us on the Map."

James grinned at his son. "Every teenager's nightmare, Dad knowing where you are and who you're with all the time."

Tom felt his anger rise up. "That's so unfair! You shouldn't be using it to spy on me! We didn't do anything! We were just talking."

James raised his hands in front of him in a calming gesture. "It was not my intention to spy on you. I apologize for making a joke out of it but you were out after curfew. I was checking the Map to see if any unauthorized people were in the school. With almost everyone else in their dorms, your names stood out."

His father's explanation made sense, but Tom still felt angry over James's taunt. In a curt tone Tom asked, "So what did you really want?"

A small frown crossed James's face but he didn't comment. "The wards over the Channel were crossed last week by several contacts heading out of the country. Together with the ones I eliminated at Phoenix, the number exactly matched the number of agents we know he smuggled in during his faked invasion."

His anger at his father forgotten, Tom smiled happily. "Do you think Grindelwald's forces have given up trying to find me?"

James shrugged. "That is the general opinion of the Ministry. It has been almost two years now. Aside from their attack at Phoenix, we have not heard from them or found any trace of them. Our agents in Germany were able to learn how many they smuggled in. The fact that all of the ones unaccounted for were spotted flying out of the country seems to support that."

"What do you think?" Tom asked.

James stood up from the desk he'd been leaning on and walked over to the classroom window. He stood with his arms crossed as he gazed out the window lost in thought.

"Dad?"

Without turning James answered, "It seems too neat. Why pull them out now? They were in no danger of us getting close to them. We had no leads at all on their current location. And why pull out in such an obvious manner?"

"Does it matter?" Tom asked. "You said it yourself. We knew how many they had here and how many left. I'm not saying we should relax completely, but couldn't we just be a little paranoid?"

A sigh came from James. "Perhaps," James acknowledged. "I know the last couple of years have been hard on you with the security restrictions. Having the house under the Fidelous and having only escorted trips out of the school." A snort followed that statement. "Speaking from my own personal experience, I know how it can drive you spare."

James turned back from the window to face Tom. "The general feeling at the Ministry agrees with your position. They left and I am just being paranoid. The Minister has already reduced the number of Aurors detailed to guard the schools. He said they were too vital as reinforcements in other places. Most of the ones left are injured Aurors assigned to light duty until they finish recovering. They even tried to pull me out. I argued that it would be too obvious to pull me out before the end of the school year."

James smiled weakly at his son. "The whispered opinion in the Ministry's war councils is the Count is too paranoid and set in his ways to recognize an opponent's retreat. Stupid Purebloods didn't understand my reference to the Trojan horse and didn't care once they found out the story was Muggle."

Tom walked over to his Dad and leaned against the wall next to the window. "Dad, I'll keep my guard up for now. I'll stay within the Hogwarts grounds unless you are somewhere around. But if no sign of them comes out, can we ease up on the restrictions? It was hard enough to hide it last year, but I can't keep coming up with excuses why I can't do things with my classmates on the weekends."

"I'm not going to change the wards on the house, but I know this has been hard on you." James grimaced, "If there is no sign of Dark Army activity we can look at allowing you more freedom of movement."

Tom felt a burst of elation at his father's words. It was obvious that his father was very reluctant and suspicious of the whole issue, but he had agreed! It took all of Tom's self-control to keep from running from the classroom to share this news with Mary, Nott and the others.

"That's great, Dad! Thank you!" Tom threw his arms around his father in a hug.

James motioned to the door. "Get going you before you burst."

Tom ran to the door grabbing his bag as he ran past. "Thanks, Dad! I'll see you at dinner!"

ADAD

James watched his son run off out of the classroom with a suppressed sigh.

He knew the last couple of years had been tough for the boy. Especially the last twelve months. Knowing a Dark Lord was searching for you would be hard on anyone. For a teenager that knowledge and the restrictions that came with it could be unbearable. If anyone knew how that felt, it was the man born Harry James Potter.

James tried to make the restrictions as invisible as possible. Tom spent the summers at the Evans house, not the Dursleys or the repressive Black ancestral manor. Like Harry, Tom had free run of the school within its wards. Trips to Hogsmeade occurred will shadowed by unseen Unspeakables.

However, as light as James strove to make Tom's restrictions, Tom was still aware of their presence. Tom was a good kid and tried to be understanding but it seemed there were limits to what he was willing to accept.

"Maybe it is a Fifth year thing," James muttered to himself remembering his own behavior towards restrictions in his Fifth year.

Growing up, Tom modeled himself on James to the point James and Albus discussed if Tom would be Sorted into Slytherin or Gryffindor. Where Harry Potter was a Gryffindor with Slytherin tendencies, Tom was a Slytherin with a strong Gryffindor streak. Tom drew his interests from the things he saw James involved in doing. The young wizard took James's views and perspective as his own. However, as a teenager Tom started to move from his father's shadow and assert his own positions.

Tom enjoyed the positions of leadership and the spotlight. The unofficial leader of Slytherin House, Tom had more than half of the Slytherin students aligned behind him. Albus informed James that the House relations were the smoothest he had ever witnessed. Harassment of Muggle-born students was at an all-time low while several members of Slytherin started associating with gifted Muggle-born and half-blood students. The Transfiguration professor admitted each of the approached students had some remarkable attribute that

made them stand out in some positive way, but he still saw it as a major breach of long held Slytherin tradition.

Harry Potter and Tom Evans were both natural leaders in their Houses, but their approaches and feelings on their roles were 180 degrees from one another. Where Harry was a reluctant leader, Tom revealed in it.

James reached into a draw and extracted a small silver flask. Taking a quick drink, the Muggle scotch was smooth going down. He allowed the alcohol to relax him as he leaned back in his chair.

What James had not told Tom was his efforts to maintain the level of vigilance on Tom had caused a backlash within the Ministry. The Count had made too many enemies with his 'charge ahead' attitude. Certain Ministry bureaucrats and Wizengamot politicians were using his 'paranoia' to marginalize the Count's authority. Even with Thomas Potter's support the Count had been moved out of many of his responsibilities.

Tom's duel with the French Minister's son last spring did a large amount of political damage within the Ministry. The 'Weatherbys' of the Ministry, looking for the chance to curry favor with Minister Sardennes, attacked the protection budget as showing undue favoritism to a single underage half-blood wizard. James did not believe Minister Sardennes was even aware of their efforts on his behalf. In fact, James was willing to bet the French Minister was completely unaware of Tom's status. However, Umbridge proved logic never stopped a petty government worker with a grudge.

The British Minister of Magic was not much help either. A politician to the bone, Minister Nott accurately predicted the change in the wind and withheld his support. Even when James and Thomas reminded him that if the Dark Army struck at Tom there was a very good chance his son would be in the immediate area did any good.

James dropped into his chair suddenly exhausted from the whole affair.

'I wonder if I owe my old Headmaster an apology,' he wondered. How much of the misery of Harry's early life was the result of compromises

and 'lesser of two evils' choices forced on Albus by small minded wizards and circumstances.

"Being an adult sucks," James muttered before closing his eyes.

2 January 1943 - Hogsmeade

Sixteen year old Tom Evans enjoyed the feeling of wandering through Hogsmeade with his girlfriend, his best mate and several other friends. Snuffles enjoyed running ahead of them and greeting the villagers in his unique fashion. The shopkeepers, well-acquainted with the large dog, just smiled when the dog appeared.

The boy walking through the village would have been instantly identifiable to a twelve-year-old Harry Potter or eleven-year-old Ginny Weasley. Physically, Tom was now identical in appearance to the Tom Riddle they met in the diary. At five feet, ten inches tall, Tom stood three inches taller than his father. With his thick, wavy brown hair, good looks and charismatic air, Tom often found himself the center of attention this year. The young wizard found he enjoyed having people look to him for guidance and advice. The younger Slytherins all looked to Tom as their leader. Tom was arguably one of the top five student leaders in the whole school.

The village was full of students from Hogwarts free from the burdens of school assignments and exams. Due to the war, a large percentage of the Hogwarts students were unable to return home for the holidays. With no current danger from the Dark Army, Headmaster Dippet allowed the students free access to Hogsmeade for the duration of the holidays.

Tom spent the last week at home with his mother and siblings but now he planned on spending the rest of the holiday break at school with his friends. OWLS were coming up and the push to revise had started for the Fifth year students. Tom used the excuse of revising for his exams as the reason for his return to school.

"Did Professor Evans give you permission to be in the village today, Tom?" Xurana asked.

Tom shrugged noncommittally. "Dad is in London for a meeting. Besides, I'm sixteen now. Next year I'll be a legal adult. I shouldn't have to ask permission to come into the village." Mary squeezed his hand in a comforting fashion. Tom smiled down at her.

"I don't understand why the professor is so overprotective of you," Xurana commented in a distracted tone. "Doesn't he trust you to make the right decisions or be safe? I mean, he doesn't stop the rest of us from coming into Hogsmeade."

Tom ran his free hand through his hair as he answered her. "My dad does trust me. He... just had some bad experiences before moving here and adopting me. He lost a lot of people he cared about. He doesn't want to see it happen again so he's a bit overprotective."

Nott laughed at Tom's statement. "I think he is just scared of your mother's reaction if anything happened to you."

The group laughed at the thought of the warm, pleasant Healer causing anyone to be afraid.

Tom grinned, "You laugh, but I'd rather get yelled at by my Dad than have my mother's 'I am disappointed in your behavior' look. She can make my sibs cry with a glance."

Andrea punched Tom in the arm. "You be nice. Your mother is a sweet lady."

"Ow! I know she is. I just meant you don't want to get on her bad side. Her disappointed glances are worse than any screaming would be." Tom rubbed his arm where she had hit him. "That's going to leave a bruise."

Andrea gave him a mockingly sympathetic look. "Oh, I'm sorry. I sure you could get Mary to kiss it and make it better." The group laughed as Mary growled at Andrea's comment.

Tom looked at the two witches with amusement. "Okay, let's get Laura's parchment so we can get to the Three Broomsticks. I'll buy the first round of butterbears."

No one objected to this proposal and the group continued on their way through the village.

13 March 1943 - Hogwarts

An urgent sounding whisper broke his concentration. "Tom!"

Tom looked up from his Ancient Runes text to glance around the classroom. Xurana was glaring at him from her seat across the aisle.

"Hmm?"

"Professor Binns asked you a question! You lost Slytherin five points!"

Tom waved her comment away. Everything the professor covered in class was in their History of Magic texts. Professor Binns just loved to ramble on about the Goblin wars. As long as no one interrupted his lecture, the man did not really care what the students did. Tom had an exam with Professor McMillan next and that crazy witch was fanatical about the exactness of their runes translations!

"Mr. Evans!"

Tom looked up at his professor now. "Sir?"

"We were discussing Dark Lords, Mr. Evans. Mr. Holliander posed the question what would stop the next Dark Lord from rising. Would you care to answer his question? You did a remarkable paper on the topic just last term."

Tom had felt a cold shiver run up his spine during the first part of Binn's question. His first impulsive answer was 'Keep me happy, sir.'

Somehow, he did not think that answer would go over too well.

"Professor, I don't think we can stop a Dark Lord from rising. Every witch and wizard is constantly armed with a deadly weapon. A British Muggle historian named Lord Acton said, '**Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely**'. The more powerful the spellcaster, the more temptation they have to use their power to get what they want. Once they start using their power to force their own

position it would almost be inevitable for them to be willing to use darker magic. Magical society actually tends to foster that behavior.”

“Are you saying you are going to go dark, Evans?” Dolohov sneered from across the room.

Tom smiled at his fellow Slytherin. “You think I am a powerful wizard? Thanks, Antonin.” The smile dropped off Tom’s face. “The answer to your question, is yes.” The room stirred at this.

“Rather, under certain circumstances, yes, I could have ended up going dark. With my...background and power it would not unfortunately be too hard to imagine me making the wrong decisions.”

‘In fact, after seeing some of Dad’s memories, it is too bloody easy,’ Tom mentally added with a derisive snort.

The room seemed deeply disturbed by Tom’s admission of the possibility he could have gone dark. “Do you really think society fosters Dark Lords?” a Hufflepuff asked.

“Witches and wizards automatically defer to those with greater magical power. It’s why we tend to look down on Muggles and squibs. A poor but powerful wizard or a wealthy, near Squib, which would most of us rather be?” Tom asked in a rhetorical manner. “I don’t think this is just true of the Dark. Professor Dumbledore commands a great deal of respect in our community because of his power level. Professor Dippet may be Headmaster but Professor Dumbledore receives an automatic level of respect because we sense his power. It is almost a pack animal behavior.”

An uncomfortable murmur rose around the room at Tom’s question but no one was brave enough to openly answer.

“To touch back on Dolohov’s question, if I ever did go dark I will tell you that more than one of the people in this room would have been willing to follow me into the dark in exchange for power.” Dead silence met the odd surety of Tom’s pronouncement.

Binns looked like he'd seen a ghost. "Er, thank you, Mr. Evans, for your input. You may go back to what you were doing now."

"Sure thing, professor!" Tom agreed cheerfully.

Once the class's attention had been diverted, Nott leaned over to whisper, "Way to completely destroy the class, mate. You'd never go dark."

Tom smiled but did not answer. He knew Nott would take that as agreement.

ADAD

Lunch that day was rather quiet at the Slytherin table. A large number of the students in the Great Hall spent their lunch watching Tom and whispering to one another. Even his friends with the exception of Nott looked a bit nervous.

Tom sighed into his lunch. He realized how stupid it was to make his comments in History of Magic. It was one thing to write a paper only his professor to read, but to say it in class where it would be misunderstood and gossiped about was not very smart.

"Grandpa Salazar would be so proud of this one," Tom muttered sarcastically to himself.

A hand grasped Tom's shoulder. Tom glanced over at Nott. The other boy had a mischievous glint in his eye.

"So, Tommy. Have you picked out a name for yourself yet?"

"What?"

"Your Dark Lord name. Sorry, but the Dark Lord Evans just doesn't sound too scary. Grindelwald's name isn't too bad, at least if you've read Beowulf. Maybe you could steal one from history. What about the one your father told you about from when he was little?"

Tom almost gagged on his pumpkin juice at Nott's question. Dad never mentioned Voldemort outside of the house! How did Nott know about that! Tom glanced over at his friend in confusion.

"I heard you and your father talking out at the Quidditch pitch. What was his name? Vader something?"

Tom's laughter echoed off the ceiling and walls of the Great Hall. The students who had been whispering about the nascent Dark Lord in their midst watched in amazement as that same wizard broke into gales of laughter. Tom's laughter seemed reassuring to many of the students who had heard the rumors.

Holding his ribs, Tom tried to contain his laughter. During the summer his father had placed the memories of watching a series of Muggle films into his penseive. Tom enjoyed watching the films with his brother Michael. (Michael stole Dad's cloak and announced he was a Jawa.) How could Tom explain they had been talking about a Muggle film that wouldn't be released for another thirty-five years?

"The Dark Lord Vader? Not bad, but it has kind of already been used," Tom answered in a breathless voice from laughing.

"Tom, Nott, this isn't funny!" Mary yelled at them. "I don't think those rumors will help you when you try to get a job, Tom. Why would you joke about something like that?!"

Nott grinned at the upset witch. "I don't know, it might *help* him get a job in the Ministry if the stories I hear are true."

Laura and Andrea giggled as Mary started to get angrier.

"You have to take this seriously! We are at war with a Dark Lord and you people are making jokes! We leave school in two years!"

"You know, you could use Potter," Nott suggested. "Legally, they did adopt your family into the clan."

Tom pretended to think for a moment while Mary appeared on the edge of an apoplexy. "Hmm, Dark Lord Potter. It works but I don't think it fits me."

Mary made a small growl of rage as she stormed away from the table.

“Oh mate, I think you are going to pay for this one,” Nott smirked.

Tom frowned in the direction his girlfriend had stormed off in. “I don’t understand why she has been so moody lately. She would have been laughing with us last year.”

Laura snorted at Tom’s clueless comment. “Not all of us have your academic gifts, Mr. Clueless. Mary is worried about her OWLS and is spending all of her free time studying. I think she is worried about not getting into enough NEWT classes to qualify for mediwitch training.”

Tom looked a bit embarrassed at having to have his girlfriend’s behavior explained to him. “Er, oops.”

Xurana smiled at Tom’s uncomfortable reaction. “You should also remember she is in Slytherin for a reason. Your efforts aside, this is the house of the cunning and ambitious. She wants the Slytherin witch dream, a powerful and influential wizard husband. Having the wizard in mind make a public statement saying he is going Dark puts a crimp in that dream.”

“I did not say I was going Dark! I was saying IF I did...”

Laura reached over Nott to pat Tom’s arm while throwing Xurana a small glare. “We know Tom. I am sure most of it is just Mary being worried about OWLS. I’m sure she will be back to normal soon.” The witch gave Tom a small smile. “Of course, doing something to show how sorry you are for upsetting her wouldn’t be a bad idea either.”

14 March 1943

Tom led Mary into the small classroom on an upper level of the Astronomy Tower. Tom had pried her away from studying her Fourth year Transfiguration text. After a great deal of pleading, Mary had agreed to join Tom on a short walk before curfew started.

The teenaged witch stopped in the doorway with open shock on her face. Spread out on the classroom floor was a picnic blanket with a wicket basket stuffed with food. A small bucket sat on the side of the

blanket with a number of butterbeer bottles inside. A cooling charm had obviously been cast on the bucket as the bottles were slightly frosted.

Tom led Mary over to the blanket and settled her down.

"I wanted to apologize for getting you so upset yesterday. I figured we hadn't had much alone time recently, so I thought this would be a good idea."

Mary smiled, "This is lovely, Tom." She leaned over to leave a light kiss on Tom's lips. Tom felt a jolt of shock run through his body. No one outside his family had ever kissed him before. Tom realized he liked it. He noticed Mary was watching him with an expectant smirk on her face. Tom gathered his courage and started to lean in.

"Do Master Tommy and Miss Mary need anything else?"

Tom and Mary jumped at the sudden question. They looked over to see Tweaky standing there in his tea cozy clothes and a brilliant grin.

"No, Tweaky. Everything is wonderful," Tom assured the elf. Tom tried to communicate to the elf that he should leave without actually saying it.

The excited elf did not seem to get the hint. "But Master Tommy, how can that be? You have not even looked at what we have been making for you!"

Tom smiled at the earnest expression on the house-elf's face. "Okay Tweaky, we'll try the food first." The happy elf clapped in his delight.

"If you need more, just call for me! Master Nott told me you would need lots of personal attention tonight! Leave us a nice mess so I can be cleaning it up!" With a slight pop, the house-elf was gone.

Tom wanted to bang his head on the wall. "I'm going to kill him!"

"Tweeaky? He's a sweetheart."

“Not Tweaky. I’m going to kill Nott,” Tom explained. “Nott told Tweaky to give us lots of attention.”

Mary smiled at Tom in a way that made him glad he was already sitting down. “Well, we can enjoy the food Tweaky made for us. Then maybe we can have some desert.”

Tom’s stomach did a slow roll-over.

Mary handed Tom a plate as she pulled food out of the basket. “Oo, Tweaky sent us a cherry pie! There are some chocolate biscuits in here too.”

3 June 1943

“My brain is numb.”

Tom grinned over at the witch walking next to him. Professor McMillan warned them the Runes OWL was nasty.

“I’m sure you did fine, Xurana. You’ve always done fine in class. Just be happy that was our final OWL exam.”

Tom’s comment caused a worn smile to appear on the young witch’s face. “Thanks. I sure you breezed into an O.”

For some reason, Xurana’s comment made Tom feel uneasy. “I wouldn’t say it was easy,” he started to say.

Xurana wrapped her hand around Tom’s arm. “Tom, I was just saying you are the best wizard here in almost all of our classes.”

Tom shrugged uncomfortably.

“It is only natural, I suppose. I guess it came from your family. You can’t have the Heir of Slytherin failing any of his classes, now can you?”

“Don’t say that in public!” Tom hissed as he looked around to see if anyone had overheard.

Xurana shook her head and looked apologetic. "I'm sorry. I'm not thinking straight after the exam."

"It's okay," Tom assured her. "Just be more careful in the future."

Xurana smiled, "Thank you. I'll be more careful."

The pair walked down towards the Slytherin dungeon. As they reached the Entry Hall, Xurana cleared her throat nervously. "Tom, can I ask you for a favor?"

"Sure, I'd love to have you in my debt," Tom joked.

"Since everyone else is still in their exams, will you go with me to Hogsmeade?"

Tom stopped walking. "Why do you need to go into Hogsmeade?"

Xurana blushed and looked at her feet. "I need to get someone a present." She peeked up at Tom. "It's for my boyfriend."

Tom's grin grew across his face. "Boyfriend? When did you start dating, you sneaky person you? And who is the lucky guy?"

"Will you come with me? I need a man's advice."

Tom smiled at the imploring dark eyes. "Yes, I will come with you, but you have to tell me who this mystery man is." Tom enjoyed teasing his quiet friend as she led the way onto the Hogwarts grounds.

The two students followed the path from Hogwarts to the village. Headmaster Dippet allowed the students to travel to the village once their exams were completed. The Express would not be leaving until tomorrow afternoon so the whole school would be decompressing tonight.

"Come on, tell me who he is!" Tom had been trying to get Xurana to tell him who she was dating the entire walk down to the village. She just kept laughing at him and running ahead. "Is he in our House? Is it Rosier?"

“No, it’s not Rosier, but he is in our House.”

Tom considered for a moment as he followed Xurana. “You can’t stand Dolohov and Mulciber. All of the Sixth and Seventh years are already dating. It would have to be Tarkington or Black.”

Xurana smiled at Tom as she opened the door to the apothecary. “You’re not too bad, Tom. Let’s stop in here first. I need to pick up some supplies. I want to start on the NEWT potions over the summer.”

“So which one is it? Black or Tarkington?”

A new voice answered, “Black”

Tom started to turn at the sound but a spell crashed into his back. He felt his body freeze up and fall to the floor. In his petrified state, Tom could do nothing to catch himself.

Before Tom could hit the floor he felt himself floating. He was moved upright and turned to face his captor. Xurana stood holding the hand of Orion Black.

Orion Black was a quiet member of Slytherin. He often hung around Tom and his friends but did not really join in. Tom had thought he was a friend of a sort. Now the boy stood holding the hand of a witch Tom thought was one of his best friends while holding Tom in a Full-Body Bind.

“The great Heir of Slytherin brought down by little me. My master will reward me for this. The Black family will be the greatest family in all of England!”

Tom wanted to scream at the pair in front of him but couldn’t even move his jaw. Inside, he screamed in frustration.

Then movement from further in the shop caught Tom’s eye. Tom’s eyes widened as a beautiful, brown haired adult witch stepped into view.

“Hello, Mr. Riddle. I am Christina. My master has put a lot of effort into finding you.”

Christina! Tom started to panic. He had to break free. He had to get out of there.

“Now relax, my little pigeon. You’re not going anywhere.”

A soft pop was heard as Tweaky appeared between Tom and his captors. “Master Tommy? Master Professor Evans said you was in trouble!” Tom could only blink trying to warn the elf. Tweaky must have heard something as he turned quickly around. “What has you done to Master Tommy?! I won’t let you hurt Master Tommy!”

Orion stepped forward with his wand raised. “I know how to deal with insolent house-elves. *Calo Vetrix!*”

Tweaky rose screaming into the air as his body started to spin. Faster and faster he spun until he was a blur. A dreadful cry came forth as the centrifugal forces tore the loyal house-elf’s body to pieces. It seemed to take forever before the now silent body exploded in a puff of blood. Body parts dropped to the floor throughout the shop.

Tom stood motionless covered in the blood of his pranking little friend. Tears left tracks through the gore on his face.

“Well, that would more than a bit excessive,” Christina observed. “Come child, my master has waited long enough.”

As the Stunner hit him, Tom’s last thought was ‘I should have listened to Dad.’

A/N: Originally this was planned for two chapters. But I decided to compress Fifth year because of story pacing. Most of what was removed was character development between Tom and his friends and Tom’s leadership in the school. Hopefully, I left enough to give you a sense of the year and Tom’s relationships. The cliffhanger has been planned since chapter 1. I just hope I can get chapter 31 written before I leave on vacation in next week! (evil grin)

Question: What should Tom's Marauder name be?

1943

January

2/3 - Germans begin a withdrawal from the Caucasus.

10 - Soviets begin an offensive against the Germans in Stalingrad.

14-24 - Casablanca conference between Churchill and Roosevelt. During the conference, Roosevelt announces the war can end only with an unconditional German surrender.

23 - Montgomery's Eighth Army takes Tripoli.

27 - First bombing raid by Americans on Germany (at Wilhelmshaven).

February

2 - Germans surrender at Stalingrad in the first big defeat of Hitler's armies.

8 - Soviet troops take Kursk.

14-25 - Battle of Kasserine Pass between the U.S. 1st Armored Division and German Panzers in North Africa.

16 - Soviets re-take Kharkov.

18 - Nazis arrest White Rose resistance leaders in Munich.

March

2 - Germans begin a withdrawal from Tunisia, Africa.

15 - Germans re-capture Kharkov.

16-20 - Battle of Atlantic climaxes with 27 merchant ships sunk by German U-boats.

20-28 - Montgomery's Eighth Army breaks through the Mareth Line in Tunisia.

April

6/7 - Axis forces in Tunisia begin a withdrawal toward Enfidaville as American and British forces link.

19 - Waffen SS attacks Jewish resistance in the Warsaw ghetto.

May

7 - Allies take Tunisia.

13 - German and Italian troops surrender in North Africa.

16 - Jewish resistance in the Warsaw ghetto ends.

16/17 - British air raid on the Ruhr.

22 - Dönitz suspends U-boat operations in the North Atlantic.

June

10 - 'Pointblank' directive to improve Allied bombing strategy issued.

11 - Himmler orders the liquidation of all Jewish ghettos in Poland.

July

5 - Germans begin their last offensive against Kursk.

9/10 - Allies land in Sicily.

19 - Allies bomb Rome.

22 - Americans capture Palermo, Sicily.

24 - British bombing raid on Hamburg.

25/26 - Mussolini arrested and the Italian Fascist government falls; Marshal Pietro Badoglio takes over and negotiates with Allies.

27/28 - Allied air raid causes a firestorm in Hamburg.

August

12-17 - Germans evacuate Sicily.

17 - American daylight air raids on Regensburg and Schweinfurt in Germany; Allies reach Messina, Sicily.

23 - Soviet troops recapture Kharkov.

September

8 - Italian surrender is announced.

9 - Allied landings at Salerno and Taranto.

11 - Germans occupy Rome.

12 - Germans rescue Mussolini

23 - Mussolini re-establishes a Fascist government.

October

1 - Allies enter Naples, Italy.

4 - SS Reichsführer Himmler gives speech at Posen.

13 - Italy declares war on Germany

13 - Second American air raid on Schweinfurt.

November

6 - Russians recapture Kiev in the Ukraine.

18 - Large British air raid on Berlin.

28 - Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin meet at Teheran.

December

24-26 - Soviets launch offensives on the Ukrainian front.

Chapter 31 – The Coming Storm

3 June 1943 - Hogwarts

It was a long standing policy of the Ministry of Magic that professors were banned from the area where students took their OWLS and NEWTS. The Ministry felt the students' performance would suffer under the additional stress of their presence. So no professors were permitted within sight of the testing area. However, by longstanding tradition, the professors complied with the letter of the policy but not the spirit.

It was a beautiful spring day in the Scottish Highlands. The Ministry proctors had decided to move the Defense Against the Dark Arts practical outside. Currently the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor students were undergoing their exams.

"I believe young Ms. Bones will achieve her Defense 'O', Professor Merrythought."

The addressed professor smiled in a smug fashion. "I believe you are correct, Filius. I believe she would already qualify for an 'E' on her NEWT. Only Mr. Evans surpasses her in practical defense." The witch turned to the third and final professor watching the Defense Against the Dark Arts practical. "I wonder why that would be. Don't you, James?"

James smiled at her comment but refused to be baited. "Ms. Bones moves very well in dodging spells. I think she will do well in the Auror training."

The three professors were standing under a large shady tree watching the students working through their Defense practical. Notice-Me-Not charms kept the students and proctors from being aware of the additional observers.

The Defense professor turned to James. "I must admit James, I was concerned when Albus proposed the creation of a Dueling class, but it allowed me to focus on Dark Creatures and other topics. I believe this is the most prepared Fifth year class I have ever seen."

James smiled at the old witch. "Thank you, Galatea, but I really..." James's face suddenly lost all of its color as an anguished expression crossed his face. His hands flew up to his forehead as he dropped to his knees in a tormented moan.

The other two professors watched in horror as James suddenly doubled over and blood appeared to flow out from between his hands.

"James, are you okay? What is the problem?" the concerned professors asked.

James ignored the questions to push himself to his feet. A stream of blood still ran down from his scar along the side of his face. Pain could still be read in his eyes as he looked towards Hogwarts. "Tweaky!"

The house-elf appeared with a small pop. "Master Professor Evans call for Tweaky?"

Before the elf even finished his question, James barked at him. "Tom is in trouble! Find him. Get him to my office or the Hospital Wing if he is hurt!"

A look of fright crossed Tweaky's face. "Tweaky go!" With a pop, the elf was gone.

"James, what is happening?" Flitwick asked.

"Alert the Headmaster and Albus, someone is after Tom." James turned and started running away from the other professors. After three paces the wizard was gone, replaced by a large wolf that ran full out towards the castle.

The testing students barely had time to recognize the large animal tearing past them before James the wolf had already reached the school entrance. The doors stood open in the warm spring sun. James never slowed down until he reached his office door.

Once he reached his door, James returned to his normal form in mid-stride. The door slammed open at a gesture as the wizard moved into the office. Inside the office Snuffles and Nagini looked up in surprise

as their nap in the streaming sunlight was disturbed. James ignored the startled familiars as he called instructions to his Map as he walked into the room.

Standing in front of the Map, James called, "Map, locate Tom Evans." The wizard cursed as the Map showed him the response for someone outside of the Hogwarts environs.

"Map, track Tom Evans, one hour." Now the Map showed Tom walking towards Hogsmeade with Xurana. When the pair of dots reached the border of Hogwarts, the Map changed to show Hogsmeade. The Map tracked the pair into the Apothecary.

James's heart stopped when he saw two symbols representing adults approach the pair of students. A quick glance at the time index told James this represented six minutes ago. 'There may still be time!' The wolf again made an appearance as James ran out of the office. This time the wolf was joined by a large black dog with a cobra riding on its back.

The animals crossed the school grounds in a flash. Students dove to avoid the onrushing canines. All three animals were well known sights around the school and the students were shocked at their behavior.

James could not have cared less as he reached the edge of the school grounds. He felt the instant he crossed the Anti- Apparition wards. He hissed instructions to Nagini then Apparated himself to just outside the Apothecary.

"Reducto! Bombus!"

The first spell blew the shop door off its hinges, the second caused a loud boom and filled the shop with a brilliant light. The light had not yet fully faded before James stormed through the door prepared for a fight.

James looked wildly around for some sign of Tom. To his dismay the only sign was the remains of Tweaky scattered about the room. James could feel the residual Dark Magic that had been used on the

loyal elf. The elf's head was tacked to the wall, his face frozen in an expression of pain.

Five minutes after James reached the shop, Professors Dippet, Dumbledore and Merrythought arrived. They found James kneeling with his back to the door in the middle of the shop floor surrounded by the remains of the slaughtered house-elf and a destroyed shop. Nagini and Snuffles sat in front of the Dueling Professor looking up at him.

Dumbledore was the only professor brave enough to approach the kneeling wizard. In a soft voice he asked, "James, what happened here?"

A cold voice answered him. "They took my son. I can still feel the residue of the Portkey they used. Tom is unconscious right now. I can't feel him."

"He may not be out of the country yet. We can still get him back. Don't give up hope, my boy."

James shook his head. "No, they've left the country already. They have been planning this for the last year. Sending most of their people home, doing it today at the end of the OWLS when everyone wants to relax. No, they planned this well."

Professor Dippet edged into the room. "James, we will get young Mr. Evans back. I am sure the Ministry will do everything in their power to return the young man safely. He is the most promising wizard of his generation."

James scoffed without looking at the Headmaster. 'Did becoming Headmaster cause one to lose all common sense?' James wondered. Aloud he ignored the Headmaster and turned to Albus. "We need to locate Ms. Sumta. She led Tom down here."

Dumbledore looked shocked. "I cannot believe Ms. Sumta would have had any involvement in this affair. She is one of Tom's friends."

James just nodded. "Have young Mr. Black brought along as well." The Transfiguration professor nodded and left the room.

"The Aurors are here," Professor Merrythought announced from near the door.

"Late again," James muttered. He turned to see two Aurors entering the shop. The older of the two was unknown to James but the younger was well-known. "Mad Eye, I am glad to see you here."

"James, is it true? We heard a report that Christina grabbed Tom. How? We know she left the country!"

"It was her. Trust me. She had a spot of inside help getting Tom out of Hogwarts. They Portkeyed out of here about fifteen minutes ago."

The unknown Auror hitched himself up with a doubtful expression. "Professor Evans, you may be an adequate teacher of school children and knowledgeable of the basics of dueling, but I suggest you leave these matters in the hands of professionals."

Seeing the look on James's face, Moody nervously interjected. "Um, James, this is Chief Auror Harold Arseburns. The Minister recently promoted him to head the Auror Defense Force."

"Another bloody Weatherby," James muttered. Grabbing hold of his temper before his magic could flare again, James glared at the older wizard. "I don't have time for this Arseburns. I am going to get my son back. I suggest you don't get in my way." James turned and started to leave the room.

As James reached the door, the officious Auror called after him, "If you disrupt an official Ministry investigation I will have you in cells. I don't care if it is your son missing or not!"

Telling Tom's familiars to return to his office, James apparated to his house. The house was empty except for a note from Sarah saying they had gone to the Potters' for the day. James floo'd the Potters to tell a very angry Sarah about the kidnapping of their oldest son.

"James Evans, I don't care if you have to burn down half of Europe, but you get our son back safely. I don't care about anything else just get him back." Even James was mildly disturbed by the icy calm in his

wife's voice. "I will tell James and Elizabeth and then bring the children home."

James nodded in agreement. "I am going back up to Hogwarts. I will floo you as soon as we hear anything." Sarah turned from the flames as two tear tracks started running down her cheeks.

Grabbing a couple of items, James left the house to return to Hogwarts.

ADAD

James found the Aurors sitting in the Headmaster's office with the Professors Dippet, Dumbledore and Slughorn. A crying Xurana sat in a chair in front of the Headmaster's desk. A stoic Orion Black sat next to her.

The Chief Auror rose as James entered. "Mr. Evans, we can find no indication that these two students were involved in the abduction of your son. Your information was false and has taken valuable time away from our investigation."

James ignored him. "Moody, what have you found?"

The chief Auror sputtered while Moody answered. "Nothing. They both deny involvement and have alibis for the time. Mr. Black was in an exam until we pulled him out."

"He wasn't there," James agreed. "But he is a witness." James turned to the Headmaster. "Professor, may I request ten minutes alone with these students? Professor Dumbledore and Auror Moody may stay to observe."

"Now see here!" the Chief Auror yelled.

"Ah, I am afraid, young James that I cannot allow that. My responsibility to all of the students requires that I stay here." Dippet's voice was gentle but still a little firm. James was not fond of the fussy little wizard, but the Headmaster did take his job seriously.

"I must remain also," Slughorn added. "After all, I am the Head of House for both of these students." James recognized through his frustration that Slughorn just wanted to say he was "on the inside" of events.

"Very well, then I must ask for all of you to make an Oath that nothing you see here will be revealed except by my permission." The professors, except for Albus, looked surprised at the request. The Chief Auror looked ready to pop a blood vessel.

"Why should we do such a thing?" Arsiburns demanded.

In an emotionless voice, James answered, "Because otherwise I will stun and oblivate you."

Before anyone could respond, Moody and Dumbledore presented their wands and swore.

"Albus, are you sure this is the wisest course?" Dippet asked.

Dumbledore nodded, "Yes, Armando. I think you should do as he asks." Nodding to Slughorn, the Headmaster proceeded to make his Oath. The Potions professor mirrored his actions immediately.

Moody turned to his superior. "Sir, you are the only one left who has not sworn. You must do so or leave. I know Professor Evans. He would not have required this without a good reason."

The senior Auror looked ready to explode. "I must do no such thing! This man has no right to ask such a thing from us! I will not sit by and..." The silently cast Stunning Spell dropped the Auror in midrant.

The two students and Professors Dippet and Slughorn looked shocked as James put his wand away. "This investigation is now under the jurisdiction of the Department of Mysteries. We are acting under the Defense of the Magical Realm Act." James gestured at his professor's robes. As the magic was released they returned to their true appearance.

The gathered wizards gaped at the Unspeakable revealed in their midst. Their shock increased when they heard Moody gasp in disbelief.

“You’re the Count?!” They noticed the Auror pointing at the sigil displayed on the Count’s robe. Normally only visible inside the Ministry, James allowed it to show in order to reduce his time explaining. “Then it really was Professor Evans who died during the attack at the Phoenix school?”

James laughed at the confusion. “No, it was another Unspeakable who was filling in for me. Even I can’t be two places at once. Don’t worry about Professor Evans, he is safe enough. Now, I would like to talk with our two witnesses.”

“I have nothing to say,” Black sneered defiantly. “I did nothing wrong!”

“No,” the Count said in a surprisingly agreeable voice. “You did not.” Orion looked surprised at the admission and then smug. “Now,” the Count continued, “your father is another story.” A look of fear crossed the boy’s face.

James approached the two students while extracting a small vial from within his robe. He opened it and pulled a muggle eye dropper.

“What is that?” Dippet asked.

“I don’t have time to play with these two. We must find Tom Evans immediately. Once I start, do not interrupt me. I will stun anyone else who talks.” James filled the dropper with potion. Moody moved over to hold Orion Black’s head in place while James placed two drops inside his mouth.

“What was that potion?” Slughorn asked. He did not seem concerned about the treatment of his students. Rather he was curious about the unknown potion.

“Ministry secret. No more talking,” James snapped. “Mr. Black did you know what was going to happen today?”

An emotionless voice answered the question. "Yes, my father told me."

James knelt down next to the young boy. "What did he tell you?"

"He told me to give him some of my hairs. He has been here several times since the start of the year. He said today he and his friends were going to take the Heir."

It was obvious James was struggling to keep his emotions in check. "What do you know of the Heir?"

"Tom Evans is the Heir of Slytherin. He told most of the House. He said the legends are wrong and he wants to change the House."

"Who were your father's friends?"

The boy seemed to struggle for a moment. "I don't know. I never met them."

James glanced over to where Xurana sat watching in shock. "What was Ms. Sumta's role in all of this?"

"She was Father's tool. She wanted Tom. Father used her jealousy to seduce her into helping. She thought it was me. He promised to marry her if she helped us 'turn Tom back to the true path of Slytherin'. Then she would be the next Lady Black and the Heir of Slytherin would be our ally."

Xurana started to wail as Orion revealed the trick that had been played on her. The crushed young witch sat with a completely devastated expression. No one in the room doubted what the Black boy had said was true.

"Did anyone use anything to make Xurana do your father's bidding?"

"I don't know."

James casually stunned Orion before administering the antidote. Then he turned to the witch who had befriended his son. Before she could react, James placed the drops in her mouth.

He waited a moment then said, "Tell me what happened today related to the kidnapping of Tom Evans."

The witch nodded. "Orion came to me this morning before breakfast. He said today was the day. He kissed me and told me to bring Tom to the Apothecary after our OWL exam. He said to say it was to get a gift for my new boyfriend. Tom was the gift."

"Mr. Black and a pretty witch were waiting for us. They cast a Full-Body Bind on Tom. Poor Tweaky came and Mr. Black killed him. I liked Tweaky. Then Mr. Black sent me back to school. He said Orion and I should stay quiet until we left for the summer holidays. We didn't want to raise suspicions." Then at James's request she described the "pretty witch." James already knew who was in the shop thanks to the Map, he just wanted his observers to hear it.

"How did you get involved in this?"

"The Blacks invited my family to dinner in August. It was a great honor. Orion was so sweet. Mr. Black proposed an arranged marriage. Our family is relatively new. A marriage into the Ancient and Noble Family of Black would mean a lot to my family. Orion was nice and he kissed so nicely. He was really good for a boy his age. I love him."

"Did you tell anyone about your relationship with Orion?"

"I told Tom this morning."

"What about before that?"

The young witch shook her head. "No, Orion told me we needed to keep it quiet. He ignored me unless it was during one of our special times."

"Why did you agree to help them against Tom?"

Even through the Veritaserum Potion, one could see emotion flooding the girl's eyes. "I loved Tom, but he only had eyes for that bint Mary. Couldn't he see she only wanted him for his family heritage? And with that bloody French veela around, he would never notice me even if I

did get rid of the bint. Orion promised Tom would come back without his stupid ideas about our House and Blood Purity. Orion said when Tom's view was changed he wouldn't want the bint or the veela anymore. If I couldn't have him, neither could they. Besides, I have my Orion now."

"Did anyone use any magic on you to make you help in this plan? Did you do it of your own free will?"

Xurana looked confused for a moment. "I...I don't know."

"Do you know where they took Tom?"

"Somewhere out of the country."

A stunner ended the interview. James knelt over her prone form to give her the antidote. Then he Oblivated the two students of everything since the arrival of Professor Evans. He floated their unconscious bodies into the corner of the office.

James turned to the silent watchers. "Mad-Eye, would you please have her blood tested? I don't think she did this entirely on her own. I suspect the elder Black used a Love Potion combined with a physical seduction to seduce Ms. Sumta into assisting in this plan. He walked a fine line to make her loyal to him but use her desire for Tom at the same time. We will have to keep an eye on Mr. Black."

"We have to arrest Black. We don't know what else he may have done!" Moody yelled.

The Unspeakable waved the comment away. "The potion I used is not recognized under current Ministry law. It would not be admissible as evidence. His barrister would destroy us in the Wizengamot. Try the head of the Black family for treason during war with no admissible evidence? No, we couldn't even hold him for questioning without something."

The Headmaster looked very disturbed. "What do you suggest we do with young Mr. Black and Ms. Sumta?"

“Let them go. We let them think they were questioned and released when we didn’t find anything. Auror Moody, your job is going to be to catch Mr. Black in his treason. I will arrange the investigation through my Department and the Minister.”

“And what will you be doing, Count?” Dumbledore asked.

“Me? I have my orders. I am going to get Mr. Evans back safely even if I have to burn down half of Europe to do so.”

3 June 1943 – Potter Manor

It was an exhausted and emotionally drained James Evans who stepped out of the Floo into the Potter’s manor. The day had been spent vainly using all of the Ministry’s resources to locate Tom or Christina. Acturus Black had been found sitting in a café in Diagon Alley. The elder Black claimed to have been wandering in the Alley all day. A number of shop keeps verified his presence all day. James argued it must have been a polyjuiced double but the Aurors refused to bring him in without solid proof. The Blacks were too powerful and too connected to lightly annoy even in a wartime situation.

It was all James could do not to hex the lot of them.

Stepping from the fire, James was immediately assaulted by a blonde witch. Thomas and Elizabeth Potter arrived right behind her.

Sarah clutched the front of James’s robes. “Did you find Tom? Where is he? What happened?”

He carefully wrapped his arms around his wife. “They tricked Tom into the village. They used a Portkey to reach the edge of the interdiction zone. The wards detected a German U-boat surface near Cullen outside of Aberdeen. About three hours ago, a flying carpet met the sub and did not return. I believe that was them taking Tom out of the country.”

Sarah broke down crying in her husband’s arms. For all of his magical power, James felt completely helpless as he stood there holding his wife. He glanced over to his grandparents. They too were

holding each other as they watched their grandson and his wife dealing with the abduction of their son by the forces of a Dark Lord.

Elizabeth walked up and placed her arm around Sarah's shoulders. "Come on, dear. I will make us both a spot of tea. It will make you feel better." Sarah released her grip on James and allowed herself to be led away.

Before she left the room, Elizabeth turned to her husband. "You take James and make sure he gets some rest. The poor boy looks worn out. He needs to be thinking straight if he is to get Tommy back." Without waiting for a reply, she led Sarah out of the room.

"Come on, James. It's best if we do what she says. You do look ready for the knackers."

James gave his grandfather a wary smile. "I know Thomas. I need to speak to the painting of Godric and Salazar."

Thomas grunted. "Best to do that in the morning. You will want your wits about for that conversation. Come on, I will get you something to drink and then off to bed with you."

4 June 1943

James woke in the morning with the sun streaming in the windows on a beautiful spring day. Sarah slept peacefully in the bed next to him. He did not remember her coming to bed.

James grabbed a change of clothes from the wardrobe the Potters insisted he keep at their manor. Thomas and Elizabeth said that as a Potter he had a right to a permanent room in his ancestral house. Sarah and the children spent enough time visiting that James had not argued too hard. Now he was very glad he didn't.

He found his grandparents attempting to feed both sets of twins. Six year-old Katie and Michael seemed much more subdued than their usual selves. They were bright children and knew something was going on with the adults. Tia and Ron were happily oblivious. They were excited because tomorrow would be their third birthday. Cake and presents were on the way.

“Daddy!” Tia yelled as his youngest daughter noticed him as he entered the room.

James put a smile on his face as he greeted his younger children. He kissed both girls and Ron good morning. Michael shook his hand instead to James’s amusement. (Michael heard this is what adults did and he was a big boy. No kissing stuff for him!)

“Daddy, is Tom home too?” Katie asked.

The Potters went white as James sat down at the table with his children. “I am afraid I have some bad news. Some bad people came and took Tom. I have to go get him back.”

Katie and Michael started to cry as their worst fears were confirmed. James would later learn the six year-old commandos were true Marauders at heart. They had eavesdropped on enough conversations to have a pretty fair idea of what was happening in the adult world.)

“Is Tommy going to miss our birthday party?” Ron asked in an innocent voice.

“I am afraid so, Ron. Daddy is going to have to go away too so I can get him back.”

Now the little ones started to cry too. James gathered them all into his arms as his children cried in their fear. Long before Harry Potter ever left Hogwarts, he promised himself that if he ever had children they would not be forced to grow up as quickly as he had. They would be sheltered and allowed to have the childhood he was prevented from having. Now Grindelwald was forcing James to break that promise to himself.

After half an hour, the children managed to gather themselves together. At their ages these kinds of events didn’t seem real. They were much more subdued, but they slowly returned to their breakfast.

Once the children returned to eating, James turned to his grandfather. “As the Yanks say, I think you slipped me a Mickie.”

Thomas smiled briefly. "A Dreamless Sleep potion mixed with the Scotch. Although you were so worn I think the alcohol did more than the potion. Elizabeth did the same to Sarah's tea. You both needed to be thinking clearly today."

Intellectually James acknowledged his grandfather was correct. It helped him contain his frustration over the time lost sleeping while Tom was missing. He said as much to Thomas.

After breakfast, Thomas led the way into his study. He had already briefed the portrait of the two Founders on the events of the previous day. The painted figures of Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor were arguing when James and Thomas entered the room. The argument was carried out in low tones but it seemed intense even without the volume.

As soon as he saw the two Potters enter the room, Salazar glared at James. "James, it is imperative that you recover my descendent immediately."

"I already planned on it, Salazar," James answered.

The painted wizard almost exploded off the canvas. "No, you fool! You are forgetting the prophecy! My great-grandson is about to enter his time of temptation! The curse of our family grows stronger as we reach the age of maturity. Your job was to help him resist that temptation! But now he is in the hands of a Dark Lord!"

Godric repeated the prophecy to the room:

One born of the House of the Lion,

Gifted as Heir of the Snake,

The last chance to redeem the Snake,

And Heal the rift to save all,

Born of the sign of Taranis,

He shall suffer and loose all

While winning

Then gamble all to win all,

If the task fails, Darkness will

Prevail forever.

Godric looked at James, "This is the gamble. Winner take all. You must recover Tom and help him resist the temptations of the Dark Lord and his own magic. Will he be Tom Evans or Tom Riddle?"

James sat heavily in one of the upholstered chairs in front of the painting. "That bloody prophecy? I thought we were passed that? Tom has shown no signs of Darkness. He's no more Dark than I am!"

Godric nodded agreement. "You have done a wonderful job so far..."

"Till you lost him!" Salazar snapped.

Godric continued as if his companion had never spoken. "Your support with your family has enabled young Tom to resist the early temptations. He may not have even been aware of them. They may have seemed the normal urges a boy his age feels. But now in that environment and without your support, those urges will grow stronger."

James sat silently in his chair for a minute. "The Tom Riddle of my past opened the Chamber of Secrets soon after he turned sixteen in his Fifth year. In the fall of his Sixth year he learned to create Horcruxes. The Tom I met in his Diary was the 16 year-old Sixth year. He created three of the Horcruxes by the time he left Hogwarts. His followers in Slytherin started calling him Voldemort sometime in Fourth or Fifth year."

"Didn't Albus notice anything?" Thomas asked curiously.

"Albus didn't trust him, but Dippet thought of Tom as a model student. He prevented Albus from acting on his suspicions. Besides, Albus was too absorbed in fighting Grindelwald. It turned out to be a fatal error, but it wasn't like Tom was walking around making open threats.

Only his closest followers knew what he was saying. I blamed Albus a bit when I was a Fifth year. Then I realized he was neither the Headmaster nor Head of Slytherin. The whole wizarding system missed Tom Riddle. It was no one person's fault." James smiled faintly in remembrance. "I always hated it when people thought I should be infallible because I was a 'hero', but I had those same expectations of Albus."

James leaned forward suddenly in his chair. "I wonder if Grindelwald got hold of Tom Riddle too."

"What do you mean?" Thomas asked.

"I always wondered what happened that allowed Voldemort to learn to create Horcrux. We could never find any books on the topic. I found some scrolls in Salazar's library that described the general process with the pros and cons of the items, but none of them gave the actual incantation to create the damned things."

Salazar's portrait coughed. "Actually, they do contain the incantations and the rituals. But they are magically hidden. The reader must already have their magical aura touched by an extremely high level of Darkness. Then they must use a Dark revealing charm with a blood element."

"Would a sixteen year-old wizard be Dark enough to cast the spell?"

Salazar frowned. "I don't think so, James. It would require years of Dark rituals and deliberate acts to stain one's aura that deeply. The scroll was written by a Dark Lord three generations before I was born. He led a particularly vile band of raiders. He only created one Horcrux. After it was destroyed, he wrote the scroll so only a worthy heir could follow in his footsteps."

"Why didn't you ever create one?" Thomas asked.

The painting shrugged. "I was already created before the real me started to go Dark. He told me about the scroll when I visited a frame that used to hang in the Chamber. From what he said, he never had any desire to live forever. He thought the price was too high."

Godric grunted a laugh. "He means Salazar liked the witches too much, even as a Dark wizard. A wizard with a Horcrux cannot create new life and loses all desire to do so. I still remember that pub trip into London."

"You don't need to be so crass about it!" Salazar scowled. "I told you. He thought the price was too high. Let's just leave it at that."

"So, Tom Riddle must have made contact with Grindelwald or some other Dark Wizard in order to read the scroll," James mused. "I think it must have been Grindelwald. I don't know of any other Dark wizards that are as far gone as he would have needed."

"The difference is that Tom knew he needed the scrolls. Our Tom was taken without them," Thomas pointed out.

James nodded. "Grindelwald is going to need to get the scrolls or Tom has no value to him. The Dark Lord already is trying to get the demon summoning scrolls from inside the Department of Mysteries vaults."

"Now he has twice as many reasons to invade England," Thomas quipped.

"I need to talk to the Minister. I am going to get Tom back."

3 June 1943 – Ministry of Magic

The Count strode purposefully into the Ministry. The red robed figure was not the most impressive or imposing form in the Atrium. He was neither very tall, nor particularly large. And on a normal day the Unspeakable deliberately reigned in his magic to make himself unremarkable as possible. Unfortunately for many of the passersby, this was not a normal day.

Thomas Potter would later joke it reminded him of Moses parting the Red Sea. The Count moved in a straight line from the Ministry's Apparition point towards the Minister's office. He never altered speed or direction crossing the crowded atrium. Nor did he ever say a word as he walked. The crowds felt the raw magic radiating from the wizard and parted on their own. No one wanted to come to the

attention of an angry wizard with that much power in his hands, particularly one with the Count's reputation.

The doors to the Minister's office opened at a gesture as the Count arrived with Thomas Potter following behind him. The Minister was meeting with several political advisors when the doors opened without warning.

"What is the meaning of this? Thomas, you may hold a senior position within my government but that gives you no right to..."

"Minister, you have heard what happened yesterday at Hogwarts?"

"I assume you are referring to the disappearance of a student from the school? Yes, Under-minister Malfoy and DMLE Chief Inspector Arsiburns reported this to me. They felt the child simply ran away from an unhappy home." James noticed both Harold Arsiburns and Abraxus Malfoy sitting in the room.

Thomas cleared his throat to capture the Minister's attention before the Count exploded. "Minister, are you aware the child in question is Tom Evans?"

The Minister blanched white. "No. No, I was not aware of that fact." He turned to his advisors. "Why was I not informed that Tom Evans was the child taken?"

Arsiburns looked indignant. "Mr. Minister, this is a domestic matter. We have no evidence that the child was taken. I suspect the spoiled child has simply run away because he did not receive the new broom he wanted. It was not worth your time, sir"

The young Under-minister agreed. "Minister, I must agree with the chief inspector. I know the Count has been important in our war effort, but I fail to see how this lies in his purview. One Half-blood orphan is not important to the war effort."

"That boy was one of the three things Grindelwald wanted when he invaded England," James growled at the blonde wizard.

"I find that impossible to believe," Malfoy sneered back.

“Not even if the boy in question is the last scion of the Slytherin family?”

The advisors turned to look in shock at the Minister. During the Count’s exchange with Malfoy, Minister Nott had wandered over to his desk and sat down. The advisors saw his pale and shocked expression and knew the Minister was serious. Almost to the man, all of the advisors were members of Slytherin House during their time at Hogwarts. (The odd exception was Chief Inspector Arsiburns who was a Ravenclaw.)

“Minister, are you sure?” one of the advisors asked.

Nott nodded absently. “Oh yes, quite sure. That is why we had so much security on Hogwarts. It was to protect the boy.” The Minister looked up at James. To the surprise of the advisors, the Minister apologized to the Count. “I deeply apologize. I dismissed your counsel and listened to certain others who did not know all the facts. It was my responsibility.” The Minister looked at his advisors. “Please leave us. And by your Ministry oaths, nothing you heard here is to be mentioned outside this office without my or the Count’s permission.”

The advisors started to leave under protest as James observed the Minister. Even through his angry haze, he had to admit the Minister’s admission of reasonability impressed him. Harry Potter never heard Fudge or Scrimgeur ever admit an error that was not the fault of an underling. Fudge’s favorite scapegoat had been Harry himself.

Once the room was cleared of all but the Minister, Thomas and James, Nott gestured at the vacated chairs. “How do you plan to recover your son? Any Ministry resources you need are at your disposal.”

James lowered his hood and allowed the Obscuration Charm to deactivate. “We have a strong reason to believe that Acturus Black was involved in Tom’s kidnapping. He used one of the Fifth year Slytherin girls to lure Tom to Hogsmeade. Black was waiting with the witch Christina. We believe Christina took Tom out of the country via U-boat.”

The Minister looked even more shocked. "Acturus? Are you sure? He has been one of our strongest supporters in the Wizengamot since his father died. Even before then he was a strong advocate for an aggressive fight against the Dark Lord."

James explained the results of the questioning of Orion and Xurana. "The Unspeakables have not been able to locate Black since the kidnapping. He may have left the country with Christina or gone underground."

"So, what do you plan?"

Thomas spoke up. "I suggested to James that if he wanted to make a stealthy entry onto the continent, he should wait until next month. My Muggle counterparts tell me they are preparing to invade Italy starting in Sicily on July 5th. The American Department of Magic is deploying a number of wizards with their landing forces. Their arrival will cause the wards to send off significant alarms. One wizard should be able to easily slip away in the chaos."

James frowned. "I don't want to wait a month to go after my son. He is in immediate danger now. We don't know what could happen to him in a month!" James's volume was raising with each word.

"If you go charging in there you could get yourself and Tom killed!" Thomas yelled back. "Think, man! They will not harm Tom. They need him. They will have him too well guarded for you to simply charge in like a wounded Gryffindor."

James wanted to continue arguing with his grandfather, but another voice stopped him. It was a voice from his past in a similar circumstance; the voice of a brilliant witch telling him to stop and think before he acted. It was the end of his Fifth year and he wanted to go charging off to rescue his godfather. The same godfather whose father and grandfather seem to have taken part in the kidnapping of his son; the same son who would have been the Dark Lord who would have killed his parents.

James put a hand on his forehead as he felt a headache coming on. 'Merlin, I hate time travel,' he thought not for the first time.

“Think about it from an objective point of view. What would you tell one of your trainees during a simulation?” Thomas pressed.

Reluctantly, James agreed. “You’re right. I need a plan before I go. We need to see if we can find out where they are keeping Tom.”

The Minister’s fire flared green as someone attempted a Floo call on the Minister’s private ‘line’. The three wizards sitting in the Minister’s office turned towards the fire as Professor Dumbledore’s familiar face appeared.

“Ah, Minister. Good afternoon. I was wondering if the Count is still with you.”

The Minister gestured to James. “He is right here, professor.”

Albs turned and smiled at James. Even through the fire one could see the twinkle lighting up his eye. “We have had a most delightful development here in Hogwarts today. It has quite distracted our students.”

“Something to do with Tom?” James asked anxiously.

“Not exactly. We seem to have acquired a poltergeist. A most mischievous creature, he seems to have been looking for young Mr. Evans.” The professor smiled. “He was most peeved when he could not find Mr. Evans. He somehow gathered a collection of Zonko’s products and water balloons and is assaulting the students and staff as they prepare to leave for the summer holidays.”

James let out a little snort. Since arriving in this time, he had never known why the pesky poltergeist never made an appearance. All of the ghosts were the same but Myrtle who would have died just a month ago in the old time line. Never having read Hogwarts: A History as a student, James was never sure when the pesky poltergeist arrived at the school.

“Is it Tweaky?” James asked.

The Transfiguration professor looked thoughtful. “I have never heard of a house-elf having a ghost before. I suppose it is possible. The

creature does not seem to remember it's previous life if it was Tweaky. He does seem driven to make messes for the elves to clean up."

'I wonder if Tom Riddle had a hand in the creation of Peeves?' James thought. 'It could explain why the Baron was the only ghost who could control him.' James set those thoughts aside.

"Thank you, professor. See if you can get anything useful out of your new resident."

Dumbledore agreed and asked if any additional information had been discovered. Thomas said he would stop by and bring Albus up to speed on the investigation. The old wizard then signed off.

James stood and replaced his hood. "Minister, thank you for your support. I will let you know before I activate a rescue plan. If I can't come to a better plan then Thomas is suggesting, I will hold off until the Italian invasion begins. Now I have to go see my wife and family. I am sure my wife is going crazy in fear. She is going to have to hear something is being done."

Minister Nott and Thomas rose with James.

"Nothing will be sufficient until your son is safely back," Nott said. "I have two young daughters aside from my son. My wife would be inconsolable if one of them were taken from us."

"Elizabeth will be having Sarah and the children staying at the Manor," Thomas told the Minister. "She feels it will help her not having to be reminded of Tom all the time. It will distract the little ones too."

James suddenly felt an overwhelming need to see his other four children and ensure that they remained safe. Then he could go about getting his oldest son returned home. And God help anyone who stood in the way of getting his son back.

A/N: Special thanks to Dellacouer for the quick editing turn around!

Chapter 32 – Gust Front

8 July 1943 – Somewhere over southern Italy

The drone and vibration of the engines lulled the crew into an odd sense of isolation. Combined with the dark of the night sky, it felt like each aircraft was alone in the universe. A discerning listener may have heard the distant rumbling of the anti-aircraft cannon firing in the distance.

The wave of American Army Air Corp B-17 “Flying Fortress” bombers was part of the Allied attempt to suppress German and Italian reinforcements off the island of Sicily. Airfields and naval anchorages were targeted by numerous British and American aircraft. The fleet of ships carrying the amphibious assault troops to Sicily was a very tempting and profitable target. The Allied commanders felt the best way to protect these easy targets was to prevent anything hostile from coming near.

The USAAC 17th Bomber Squadron’s target tonight was a mixed German and Italian airbase twenty miles inland from the coast. Crossing over the Italian city of Salerno, the flak from the anti-aircraft fire bounced the bomber crews around in their flying cans.

Checking his calculations, the navigator of the lead plane leaned back to glance through a hatch to the bomb bay. An odd passenger sat quietly in a chair usually reserved for one of the waist gunners. The machine gunners stood in their open hatches peering into the night sky looking for attacking fighters. The passenger sat ignoring the activities around him. The small man wore a black jumpsuit with the black boots often worn by paratroopers. A pistol butt could be seen in his shoulder holster and a commando-style knife of some type was in a sheath on his belt. Sitting motionless in the seat, the black-clad man seemed to meld into the shadows. Frankly, he gave the navigator the creeps.

The passenger had intimidated the American since he appeared in their briefing room in northern Africa. The crew took the rather young looking British man to be some type of spy or commando. A driven kind of light seemed to fill his bright green eyes. An air of quiet determination added to their unease.

“Sir? Five minutes till we start the bombing run.”

“Thank you, lieutenant.” They were the most words their passenger had said since take-off.

Over the next five minutes, the bomber crew was too busy to pay attention to their silent passenger. Axis resistance was increasing as they approached the target. The crew responded like a well-oiled machine to work to their mutual success and survival. Exactly on time the pilot handed control of the aircraft over the bombardier. Selecting the hardened runway and hangars as targets, the man pressed a small red button.

Almost simultaneously, the flight of bombers released their bombs. Unlike a later time where precision guided weapons could be steered through a window in ‘surgical strikes’, the bombs of this age relied on the simple physics of gravity and an optical sight. Hundreds of bombs would be dropped in an effort to destroy one target. The term ‘carpet bombing’ was used to describe the effect of hundreds of tons of explosives dropped into an area in the hope that a few of those bombs would happen on the right timing and wind to actually hit the planned target and detonate. It often took multiple missions against the same target to achieve their desired effect. Terms like collateral damage and civilian loss were not often accounted for by military planners on either side.

It was not until the bombers completed their run and had turned for home that the crew of the lead B-17 noticed their quiet passenger was missing.

ADAD

James found the feeling of free fall to be rather exhilarating. The droning of the aircraft engines fell away leaving only the rushing wind. The ground was mostly dark below except for the crossing beams of searchlights looking for the retreating bombers.

Fires and secondary explosions also lit the ground. From James’s vantage point it appeared the American flyers had succeeded in their mission. The remains of aircraft littered the ground of the airport below.

Many of the bombs dropped tonight, both here and at other targets, contained a subtle charm. The bomb load from the previous night had been charmed in the same way. It was a charm similar to the one James believed the Dark Army had used last fall during their 'escape' out of Britain. The charm emanated an aura almost indistinguishable to a living wizard. Any ward used to detect the entry of magical beings into Italy just reported dozens of wizards and witches up and down the coast. James was the only wizard actually entering the country tonight. A unit of American wizards traveled with their Muggle counterparts to Sicily but no one else was entering the mainland.

Carefully watching the ground rushing up to meet him, James extracted his miniaturized Firebolt and wandlessly enlarged it. Three hundred feet off the ground, James activated the broom. The broom's charms fought against the momentum gravity had built up. Any broom then on the market would have had to start at a much greater height. No other broom even from Harry Potter's time could have duplicated the feat.

Thirty feet from the ground, James found himself flying level over the hilly ground in a northerly direction away from the airport. In seconds, James was outside the parameter of the bomb damage and over peaceful fields. A quick scan of the area revealed no pursuing wizards.

It would be dawn in a few hours. The plan called for James to find small town to enter at mid-morning as wandering laborer. A town had been selected off the map thirty miles away from the bombed out air base. Then he would find a place to rest for a few hours so he could safely enter the village. By midmorning most people would be busy with their own lives and not notice the stranger wandering into town.

James smiled as the wind wiped past. Even with his mission to save his son, flying made his cares seemed to lessen. Or maybe it was just after a month of talking and planning, he was finally doing something to get his son back. The occasional twinge he felt in his scar told him Tom was still alive but the distance was still too great for more than the occasional blurred image or isolated word to pass across the link. At times James was tempted to simply charge ahead or go mad. At least now he was doing something.

9 July 1943 – Avellino, Italy

The one-armed man wandered into the town with a pack thrown over his shoulder and a walking stick in his hand. His clothes were worn and patched but generally clean. His empty sleeve was pinned up against his shirt. The arm seemed to stop about the middle of his right bicep.

Unlike James expected, his entry was noticed immediately. Italy was a Fascist state under the control of Mussolini. Not as restrictive as Hitler's Nazi Germany, the *Organizzazione di Vigilanza Repressione dell'Antifascismo* (Organization for Vigilance Against Anti-Fascism) was the Italian version of the Nazi SS or Russian NKVD (later KGB). The OVRA never achieved the notoriety of their northern brethren. The OVRA paid close attention to the movements of the Italian people.

Within ten minutes of entering the town, James was approached by two plain clothed men. Their dress and bearing screamed, "POLICE!" to the wizard. He allowed a look of mild apprehension to cross his face as they approached. He took a sip out of a flask as he watched them.

"Welcome to our town," the older of the two men greeted James.

"Good morning."

"What brings you to our fair town?" the older man asked.

James shrugged. "My name is Anthony Giacobbe. I am travelling to my uncle's place near Chiavari. He owns a small freight company."

The younger man snorted in amusement as the older man said, "A freight company? And what would you be able to do for him? Your papers please."

"I was a sergeant in a logistics unit during campaigns in Ethiopia and North Africa. I am very good at organization and load plans. I don't need two arms to do that," James explained as he pulled his Italian identification papers from his pocket.

The authenticity of the papers did not concern James. Anthony Giacobbe really was an Italian Army logistics sergeant who served in Ethiopia and North Africa. He was also a Squib captured by the Muggle Allies in the fighting. Sgt. Giacobbe lost his arm when the truck he was driving came under fire by a British tank unit. The explosion of the truck shredded his arm. After initial treatment by Italian medics, the wounded man was left behind by the retreating forces. The POW was transported with many other German and Italian captives to camps located in Britain.

The Department of Mysteries located the Italian Squib working as a volunteer in a military hospital. His excellent organizational skills more than compensated for his missing arm. When approached by the Unspeakables, the man agreed to allow an Unspeakable to impersonate him in Italy. (He did not feel this was treasonous as the British magical government would not be working against the Italian Muggle government. The Italian magical government was technically allied to Grindelwald, but they were more neutral than anything.) James spent two days talking to the man and learning everything about him. The real Anthony Giacobbe even suggested this town as a major logistical waypoint to catch a ride north. A couple hairs were taken for in Polyjuice potions.

The lead OVRA man handed James his paper back. "It is always good to welcome a heroic son of Italy to our town. Do you plan on staying long?" The question was asked in a pointed manner. James got the strong impression the OVRA man wanted him out of town.

"If I can find a ride headed north I would like to leave today. Would you gentlemen be able to assist me in this?"

The older man scowled at the question. "No, I do not have time to play tour director. Just be on your way by the end of today." Then he turned and walked away.

The younger agent spoke for the first time. "Don't mind him. He has much on his mind. The Allies are invading Sicily as we speak. Our German friends are getting rather pushy in their demands that we repeal them."

James managed to look apprehensive and confused. “I...I did not know about the invasion. I have been walking for the last couple of days.”

The OVRA agent waved the comment away. “Relax. My half-brother was in the Army’s logistical corps too. Come, I will take you to the lorry yard. I believe a convoy leaves for Rome in an hour.”

The surprisingly congenial secret policeman led James to the head of a forming lorry convoy. He introduced James to the lieutenant in charge who welcomed the ‘disabled veteran’ and invited James to ride in his cab.

Just before leaving, the OVRA agent took James’s hand and leaned into his ear. “Tell my brother I said hello when next you see him. Thank you for taking such good care of him. My mother appreciated his letter saying he was safe. Too bad Polyjuice tastes so bad. If you are just traveling through as a Muggle the IMM will not cause you any problems.” Then he left without another word.

James almost had a heart attack on the spot. Giacobbe must have known his brother was stationed in this town when he suggested it. The IMM stood for the Italian Magical Ministry. They were Grindelwald’s nominal allies. Obviously the younger agent was a wizard assigned to work with his Muggle counterpart.

A shaky James climbed into the lorry’s cab. James doubted the IMM knew of his mission. He suspected the wizard allowed him to pass out of family obligation rather than IMM policy. While the lorry wound its way out of town, James debated on leaving the convoy as soon as it was out of sight of town or staying as long as possible.

Eventually, James decided to risk the convoy. The chance Giacobbe was set up as a plant was incredibly small and he had been allowed no mail since he agreed to allow his identity to be used. James cast some discrete magic detection wards around the lorry. They would alert him if anyone using magic came within ten meters. That accomplished, James settled in to enjoy the ride through the Italian countryside.

12 July 1943 – Rome, Italy

The city of Rome resembled a kicked over ant hill. Everywhere James looked he saw regular Italian military uniforms mixed in with the “Brown-shirt” quasi-military troops of Mussolini’s Fascist party. When a man wasn’t in military uniform, they all seemed to be in some type of clerical garb. Everyone the convoy passed seemed to be in a rush to be somewhere else.

The convoy had taken two days to complete a journey of not more than six hours. Allied warplanes bombed bridges, roads, and other targets of opportunity (like lorry convoys). Lt. Marchesse turned into a personable traveling companion. He had a rather bleak outlook on the Italian ability to stop the advancing Allies but did not necessarily see this as a bad thing.

The lieutenant explained it to James one afternoon whilst stuck for an overturned lorry. “Once the war is over I can go home. My cousin’s wife has a sister who has more curves than a mountain road! I will marry her and go back to work in my father’s print shop. We are not scared of the communists. My father, he prints almost as many pamphlets for them in secret as he does for Mussolini in public!” It was not the most inflammatory statement the Soldier made during the trip, but it was close.

As a child, Harry never had much contact with any church. The Dursley’s were members of the Church of England who only attended Christmas and Easter services. They sat right in the first row so all of their neighbors could see how pious they were. Vernon Dursley always made a habit of casually mentioning (loudly) to Petunia how much he placed in the offering plate. Their “criminally-minded” nephew never attended the services. He was usually locked inside the cupboard.

Vernon told Petunia, in four year-old Harry’s hearing, that God would not want him there because the Bible says to kill all the witches and other freaks. This was often repeated during the major religious events. Harry didn’t believe his uncle but it did mean he had very little contact with clergy of any sort.

Watching the clergy moving through the plazas caught James’s attention. So many of them wore multiple colors, mostly black but

brown, reds, and others could be seen as well. James chuckled to himself that a wizard could walk openly down the street here and not attract any attention.

That thought was still fresh in his mind as the wards announced the presence of more than one wizard in the area. James flexed his wrist instinctively so only a tiny twitch would release his wand into his hand. He gazed casually around the plaza they had entered looking for any sign of magical people. No one sprang to his notice as the lorries continued through the city.

The convoy continued towards a supply depot where they would stop for the night. Coming to a stop to allow another convoy to pass, James opted to leave the convoy. He told the lieutenant, "I am anxious to reach my uncle's. You may be stopped here for many days."

He thanked the officer and exited the truck with his small bag over his shoulder. He quickly tried to lose himself in the crowds scurrying about the streets.

ADAD

James walked six local blocks from where he left the convoy when he noticed three Dark Army wizards converging on him. The street was too crowded to use magic. Even if he did, they were spaced too far apart to guarantee he could get all of them.

James decided to play for time as an innocent Muggle.

"Come with us and you won't be hurt," one of the wizard's said a heavily accented voice.

Acting confused, James raised his hand, "What is the problem? I have done nothing wrong! See, I am a disabled veteran of the army!"

"Come with us. We had a slight...disturbance. If you were not involved then you have nothing to fear."

Showing reluctance he did not need to fake, James allowed himself to be led off the street to a nondescript warehouse. They entered

through the Judas gate in the large doors and led James to a small office area. Two of the Dark Soldiers shackled James's only apparent arm to a radiator.

"Do you think this is the one?" one asked in German. This one was a tall, stocky looking young man. James guessed he was only two or three years out of school.

The other wizard was an average sized, average looking man. He could easily have been Italian, German or British. In other words, he was a perfect spy. He shrugged, "Possibly." Then he frowned, "No talking in here. He may speak German."

James almost laughed. So many movie and novel villains made the mistake of talking too much in front of the prisoner. He guessed the nondescript wizard read some of the same books.

The third wizard entered the room with a small vial in his hands. This wizard was between the other two wizards in age. He was absently dressed with a rather vague air. He reminded James of a Ravenclaw. His gentle exterior did not reassure James however. The wizard was a Dark Army operative.

"I finally have the chance to use the new potion we received from Berlin. The reports all say that it really does work miracles in only three drops."

James recognized the contents of the vial. The three drops comment confirmed it; Veritiserum. He never knew the potion was created by Grindelwald's forces.

James decided to play for time. He only needed a bit more.

"What is that? Why have you taken me prisoner?"

The nondescript wizard simply said, "We are going to give you a little to drink and then ask you some questions. If you are as innocent as you claim, you will be on your way and never even remember our little conversation."

James understood what that meant. Still he needed some more time. "How could I not remember? You are not even Italian! How dare you come into our country and do this!"

The mild looking wizard placed three drops of the potion onto a spoon. "Now, now, no need for theatrics. This will all be over before you know it." The other two wizards stepped closer to see the use of the new potion.

James watched the wizard approach with a bit of fear. This could end his mission before it really began.

A twitch told him he had bought just enough time. The pinned up sleeve fell away as an arm appeared to fill it. James could feel his body almost ripple as the Polyjuice potion wore off.

A right fist to the jaw removed the mild-looking wizard from the fight before he even knew it began. Opportunity dictated the next target. A wandless *Sectumsempra* slashed a bloody line across the chest of the younger Dark Soldier. A distracted portion of James's brain noted he may have use too much power on that spell based on the damage he could see. He didn't think the young wizard would live to see another day.

"Great Lord!" the non-descript wizard shouted as he dove behind a nearby desk. James did not believe the 'Lord' he called out was the Christian one either.

James took his wand from the invisible sheath on his left arm. A focused Cutting Curse removed the shackle from James's left hand.

"You will not escape from here!" the operative called from behind the desk. "We have many wizards in Rome!"

"That's nice," James muttered. A Reducto shattered the desk, pelting the dark wizard with fast moving splinters; some of them up to four inches in length.

James stepped over to the bleeding wizard on the ground. He silently summoned the man's wand and any Portkeys. The wand he snapped.

The Portkeys were banished before they reached his hand. "Not much of a fight. You let your guard down once you had me shackled."

James bent down and picked up the dropped vial of Veritserum. "Now I am going to ask you some questions and you will tell me everything I want to know."

"I need medical attention," the wizard gasped.

"Sorry, you are going to die. I would not normally be this brutal but you bastards have taken someone rather important to me and I really want him back."

ADAD

Several hours later after evening had fallen on the Eternal City, Dark Soldier Hans Gruber stumbled into the central Dark Army headquarters in Rome. He collapsed in the doorway after staggering down from the warehouse.

Central headquarters in a grander name than the building deserved. It was a tired looking building with offices located on the upper floors. The only reason the site had been chosen was the lower floor was occupied by an excellent baker. (The lead agent had a significant weakness for Italian pastries.) The office was only occupied by a half a dozen dark wizards and witches who coordinated the efforts of the Dark Army in all of central and southern Italy.

The mild-looking Gruber fell to the floor as the startled Dark Soldiers rushed to him.

"What is going on here?"

Gruber looked up as he recognized the lead agent's voice. "Mein spellfuher! A British wizard attacked us today. He...he stole some of the new Truth Potion. Jorge and Alf are dead. I ran after they fell to get help. I was stunned as I reached the street. He must have been afraid to be seen since he left me alive." His report done, the wizard slumped to the ground in obvious pain.

"What did he look like? Pay attention, man! What did he look like?"

Gruber pulled himself up against the supporting grasp of one of his fellow agents. “Bl-blond hair, almost white. Average size, light build. He sneered a lot. Called himself the Dragon.”

The lead agent turned to his lead subordinate. “Get the owls out now! I want every Soldier on the lookout for this Dragon! This is our number one priority! We can’t let those weak-kneed British Unspeakables get a hold of der Äußerster Wahrheitsarzneitrank!” (Ultimate Truth Potion)

“Sir, what about the infiltrator we were to search for?”

“You Scheiße-Kopf! This is obviously the infiltrator! He came to steal the potion. Now get moving!”

23 July 1943 – Italian - French Border

The next eleven days, James traveled by night in his wolf form. The Dark Army had erected Apparition traps throughout northern Italy. Anyone attempting to appropriate past these points would be diverted to magical checkpoints. Dark Soldiers would then check the identity and approvals of the traveler. They had done the same with the Floo network.

Word had come four days ago that the Allies had bombed Rome. The Italian media reported the damage as ‘light’ but the people did not seem to really believe their newspapers. Just yesterday it was announced the Allies had captured Palermo, Sicily. This gave them almost undisputed control over the island. The rumour was the Americans recruited several well-known mafia leaders from the U.S. to work with the local mafia leadership in order to assist the U.S.-led invasion. Each village and town James passed was filled with certainty that an invasion force would be landing on the mainland of Italy soon. Many were talking openly about surrendering before the war reached their shores.

James came to a small rise on the edge of an orchard about ten miles from the Italian-French border. It was late in the afternoon and the sun was low on the horizon. The rise overlooked a major road running parallel to the border the wolf would have to cross. Military vehicles filled the roads all across Italy. This road also showed the

signs of heavy recent use. For the last two days he had seen more German troops than Italian and all of them had been headed south. Although spotting a wolf in the lower light conditions was not easy, James did not want to take the chance of being shot by a passing soldier.

The wolf silently padded across the road and into the brush on the other side. A small forest rose up ahead to the wolf's delight. Forests meant few people and faster travel for the wolf. James wanted to howl in pleasure. If this forest crossed over into France the border would not be a problem.

Bounding through the forest in great, ground-eating lopes, the wolf covered a lot of ground. The setting sun and the forest canopy left the wolf running in a twilight condition. The forest was quiet as the local animals sensed the arrival of a large predator in their area. Not a foolish precaution as the wolf had dined twice on rabbits that crossed his path. The peace of the forest and the effort of the run felt good to the wolf.

Without warning the wolf suddenly leapt into a clearing. The wolf was actually startled by his emergence into the small grassy field. James mentally berated himself for losing focus on his surroundings. James glanced around to verify he was alone in the field.

"You move very quickly, young man."

James the wolf whirled quickly around in shock. He immediately crouched down in a posture that allowed either a quick attack or even quicker retreat.

An old wizard stood at the edge of the field. He emerged from the shadow next to where James entered the clearing. The wolf must have passed right by him for the man to have been standing behind him.

"You are very difficult to track down, Count. We have been trying to make contact since you entered Rome. Your incident with the OVRA prevented us although I must say your misdirection with them was masterful. They have been watching all of the ports and landing points out of Italy, not, however, to the north."

A small shimmer and where a wolf once stood now stood James with his wand drawn. "Who are you?" James was wearing the same black commando-style outfit he'd worn when jumping out of the American bomber.

The old wizard held his hands out to show he had no wand. "My name is Montefleur Jacobi. I am a member of the magical resistance against Grindelwald's madness. Albus Dumbledore sends his greetings."

James held his wand on the old wizard. The unknown wizard stood at just over five feet tall and was built on the wiry side. A short beard of white sat under a well-tanned and wrinkled face. Unusual for a wizard but the man had the look of someone who worked outside. James placed his age as over a hundred and fifty.

"How do I know I can trust you?"

The wizard grinned. "Call me Monte. I swear on my life and magic that everything I tell you tonight will be true to the best of my knowledge and not an attempt to lead you into a trap."

James could feel the magic swirl around the old wizard and accept his oath. With a nod of acceptance James relaxed from his fighting stance and lowered his wand to a ready position.

The old wizard cautiously drew his wand. He gestured to the field. "Do you mind?" Before James responded the old man gave a negligent flick to create two very comfortable looking chairs with a table between them. A second flick created a tea set complete with steam coming out of the pot.

"Come, let us have some tea whilst we talk. It is a cool night for an old man to be out of his bed." Monte settled himself down into a chair and poured tea into two cups. "How would you like your tea?"

James ignored the question and settled into his chair. The transfiguration display was done with a casual finesse of a true master. "Who are you?"

"I am hurt. You mean young Albus has never told you stories of me? I am crushed. I am Montefleur Jacobi, formerly Professor of Transfiguration at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." The old wizard grinned. "Young Albus took my old job when I decided to retire and return to my native Italy. I find fishing in the Mediterranean air to be much nicer on my old joints than cold, damp Scotland. I decided after misters Dumbledore, Potter, and Grindelwald completed their seven years under my tutelage that retirement would be a good thing."

The old wizard paused to sip his tea. "Ah, that's nice. I find I do miss a good English tea."

"You had news for me, sir?" Sir? Where did that come from?

The Italian wizard smiled in amusement. "A polite young wizard! It is nice to see the quality of the young wizards Hogwarts is producing has gone up. Hard to believe with Dippet and Dumbledore in charge." The wizard chuckled into his tea cup. "But yes, I have news for you, young Count."

"A member of the resistance spotted your son three weeks ago in Germany. He was being held at a special facility Albert uses for keeping particularly sensitive prisoners. Our informant is a member of the staff and keeps tabs on who is held there."

James shot forward in his chair. "Three weeks! Why wasn't I told before this?"

Monte raised a placating hand. "Word only reached England after you had entered Italy. We knew your planned route but we have been unable to catch up to you. Then this morning my nephew happened to hear a Muggle farmer discussing the wolf that ran past his sheep. He was bragging his dog scared it away. It gave us a much smaller area to search."

"Do you think he is still there?"

"We believe he is. The witch Christina seems to be in charge of him now. It seems the young man has managed to escape at least three times for short periods of time. Apparently the last time he escaped

he reached their potions lab and caused it to explode four hours later. Grindelwald's witch then took control of him personally."

James wasn't sure how he felt about the news. On one hand it was the first confirmed news they had received and it sounded like Tom was continuing his Revolution. The Marauders and Weasley Twins would have loved blowing up the potions lab. But having Christina as his jailor would make it much harder to get Tom out safely.

"Thank you for getting me this news. I have to get moving if I want to reach Hamburg before they move him."

Monte reached into his robes and pulled out an envelope. "Here is a travel authorization and identification for a Dark Army Soldier who was to return home for a leave. He is my nephew's cousin we have made see the Light. You will need to reach Dijon before you may use them. That was his duty station and origin point on his papers."

James took the papers. "Are you sure they are safe?"

"He will remain at his post until the night of the 26th. That is when his leave starts. Then you may Apparate to Hannover. I would suggest using Muggle transport to Hamburg. You should be in Hamburg by the 27th."

James nodded. It seemed a good plan and with Monte's oath he felt it was trustworthy. "Thank you again. This will be an immense help."

The old wizard set down his tea and rose from his chair. James stood with him and the chairs disappeared to whence they came. "Be careful as you approach the border. The Dark Army has placed a number of patrols. We would not want you to come across them unaware would we?"

James flushed a bit at the softly implied criticism. "No, I wouldn't."

Monte laughed in a delighted chuckle. It was nice to know he could still make a student squirm with just a kindly phrased question. "May I suggest a good aura detection charm? It will not show you who or what is hiding, but it will cause all magic to glow, including magical

traps. It will also last several hours and not interfere with your animal self's night vision."

James felt himself flush again. This guy was better than his old Headmaster. Then James grinned. "I am going to have to ask Albus and Thomas about you. I'll need to be armed next time we meet."

The old wizard laughed. Then he shimmered for a moment to be replaced by a black crow. The crow gave a single caw and flew away into the near darkness.

A moment later, a wolf ran out of the clearing.

ADAD

James reached the edge of the forest about an hour later. The border lay a short distance ahead. Very little cover existed over the next mile. The forest gave way to a flat, grassy field with only a series of low stone walls marking out the boundaries of the farmers' fields.

The full moon was starting to rise over the edge of the trees. Only a sliver could be seen but the added light would make it much harder to cross the fields unseen. James glanced around and did not see any sign of humans, magical or otherwise. It was a risk but one he needed to make.

The wolf trotted out of the tree line and across a small lane to the edge of the fields. He hopped over one wall and started across the field. He ran along another wall running across the field using its shadow to help hide.

An instinct caused James to leap to the side just as two spells caused the turf where he had just been to explode into the air. The wolf bolted over a nearby wall and swerved again. The green light of a Killing Curse lit the wizard's green eyes as it passed by.

James knelt behind the wall with his wand firmly in his grip. It did not take long to spot his attackers. Three figures on brooms flew overhead in a looping pattern. The three flyers were turning for another pass.

James didn't have time to pull his shrunken broom out of his pack and get in the air before they came back around, even on the brooms of the 1940's. James watched their course as the three pulled into a rough formation. Their approach placed the wall James the wolf had dove over for cover was now behind him.

Hitting a target on the ground in the dark will flying is not as easy as it sounds. Aiming the wand in the wind made accuracy a chancy thing. James estimated the distance they would need to reach before an accurate spell could be cast. Then he waited.

The three closed in while accelerating. James whirled his wand over his head and pointed at the flyers. "*Vertnex!*" A spinning vortex of wind spun out of the end of the wand directly into the path of the approaching brooms.

The center flyer reacted with superb reflexes, but bad judgment. He attempted to dive under the wind forgetting his altitude and speed. He planted the end of his broom into the field and smashed to the ground.

His companions did not react as quickly. Both flew into the spinning mass of air. The spinning motion ripped them from their brooms and dropped them twenty feet to the ground.

James ended the spell as his attackers fell to the ground. The spell was useful against aerial opponents but had a relatively short range and was tiring to maintain.

The two wizards dumped by James's wind were already climbing to their feet.

One of them yelled to James. "Surrender your wand, traitor! This is your only chance."

"Traitor?" James asked in a wry voice. "How am I a traitor?"

"The Great Lord is the master of all wizards and witches! His vision will lead us into a glorious future! You heretics deny him his rightful overlordship."

“Great,” James muttered to himself. “A true-believer follower. He sounds like Belatrix.”

The other wizard was trying to move into James’s blind spot. James leveled his wand and said, “*Sagitto exeonero*.” Three small balls of light burst from the wand. The balls turned into arrows shortly after leaving the wand.

The targeted wizard dove to avoid the arrows. He avoided two but the third caught him high on his thigh. It impacted with a meaty thud. The wizard let out a scream of pain and dropped to the ground as his leg gave out.

The true believer used the opportunity to launch his own attack. The proximity of the wall behind him prevented James from being able to dodge the unknown spell. James’s shield absorbed most of the energy from the sickly orange colored spell but some bled through to cause a burning sensation in his chest. He faintly smelled brimstone as he took a short, sharp breath when the spell hit.

James allowed himself to fall back over the wall as he fought to gain his breath. He placed his hand over his chest and wandlessly cast a healing charm. The bands of pain across his chest loosened to allow him to take a breath. James was glad he had gotten a strong shield erected before the spell hit.

James raised his wand over the edge of the wall and silently cast a modified Blasting Curse. Without looking up, he rolled to the left and popped up to his feet. The arrow-shot wizard had regained his footing but the arrow still pinned his robes to his leg. James scanned for the second wizard.

A purple spell fired from the corner of James’s vision. He whirled to the right and cast a silent Ice Storm Hex. Shards of ice flew across only to impact on a hastily raised physical shield. The shield flared as its magic resisted the ice shards.

While his opponent was blinded by the shield’s flare, James fired a Concussion Hex at the wizard’s feet. The wizard was thrown back as the hex caused a silent explosion of over-pressurized air to erupt at the edge of his shield.

Sensing movement to his other side, James reached out his free left hand and shouted, "*Accio arrow!*"

The other wizard released another shriek of pain as the barbed arrowhead was ripped from his leg by the overpowered Summoning Spell. The violent extraction of the arrow caused one of the barbs to slice through the femoral artery in his thigh. The wizard lapsed into shock due to pain and rapid blood loss. Without immediate medical attention, the unconscious wizard would have no chance of surviving long enough to return to consciousness.

No medical help would be summoned.

James ignored the unconscious wizard except to summon his wand. Then he turned to the wizard he hit with the Concussion Hex. Carefully he approached the wizard to see him down on the ground. One of his legs was twisted back in an unnatural fashion at the knee. His right arm was obviously broken from trying to catch himself on landing. The bones of his forearm were visible as he cradled his arm.

Through his pain the wizard gritted out. "You bastard! Oh, Great Lord, this hurts! You will get yours soon enough."

James summoned the wizard's wand and any Portkeys. The wand he snapped and the Portkeys were banished before he touched them.

That finished, James asked. "Now, do you want to tell me what your assignment for tonight was?"

"Did you forget about me, Englishman?"

James turned to find the third of the flyers standing thirty feet behind him. James mentally smacked himself for losing track of the wizard who smashed into the ground at the start of the fight.

"Unfortunately, yes, I did. Your two friends kept me busier than I expected." James looked at the wizard across from him and noticed he did not have a wand drawn. Alarm bells rang in his head. Who walks into a magical fight without a wand in their hand?

"I think you forgot something rather important."

The wizard gave James a nasty grin. "I think not, wizard. I don't need a wand for this. I am going to enjoy this. You see, you forgot something. It's a full moon."

The werewolf had timed his approach perfectly. The full moon crested the trees to bath the field in its light. James watched in as the dark wizard ripped off his robes as the transformation started. James glanced down at the injured wizard to see the change starting on him also.

James stepped carefully away from the injured werewolf. He was not sure if the transformation would heal the injured arm and leg. Standing too close would not be a good idea in either case.

Three options came to James's mind. He could change to his bat form and escape. His wolf form could fight the werewolf and not become infected by lycanthrope. Escaping as a bat would work but the werewolves would report back about the fight and his description. Grindelwald would know the Count was in France. Fighting as a wolf was a chancy thing. Even if he won there was a very good chance he would be injured in the fight.

So James decided on the slightly dishonourable but much more pragmatic approach. He reached into a pocket on his chest. "I don't have time for this."

The fully transformed werewolf sprang at James with a snarl.

Three quick pops threw the werewolf back to the ground. It released a small whining noise and collapsed to the ground. Two more pops put an end to the injured werewolf straining on the ground.

James ejected the clip from the Colt 1911 in his hand and replaced it with one that had dropped to the ground. The clip holding the special .45 silver bullets went back into his pocket. The pistol went back into its shoulder holster.

Within five minutes a wolf ran across the border into France. Behind it burned the remains of three werewolves and their brooms.

The Count had a schedule to keep.

Chapter 33 – Feuersturm

26 July 1943 – Hamburg, Germany

James stepped off the train in Hamburg a full twelve hours ahead of his original schedule. Say what you wanted about the Nazis, but they did make the trains run on time.

The train station was ornately decorated in a grand, almost over the top style. Those decorations clashed with the bomb damage caused by a British bombing raid only two days ago. The rubble had been cleared away but several walls showed cracks from the shocks of the explosions. The raid had been targeted on the manufacturing districts but winds, smoke and simple poor judgment by the bombardiers caused a significant percentage of the bombs to fall outside the planned target areas. The town hall, the main police station and the city's telephone exchange were all damaged in the attack.

James made a casual display of nonchalance as he waited in line to be cleared to leave the station by a pair of Gestapo guards. The headline of the newspaper proclaimed the betrayal of '*Il Duce*'. The Italian Supreme Leader, Mussolini, had been removed from power by members of his own government. The 'betrayers' included the Italian Foreign Minister who was also Mussolini's son-in-law. The newspaper article claimed the Nazi government condemned the internal coup and pledged its continued support to the dictator.

The Gestapo guards passed James's papers without comment. The Dark Army Soldier who joined the resistance provided an excellent set of papers. A Muggle looking at them saw clearances from Gestapo headquarters for unrestricted travel. From the expression on the guard's face when he handed the papers back to him, James bet the man assumed James was a Gestapo agent on discrete travel.

A short walk led James to a small inn with a restaurant that was still open. Its windows had been covered up with boards to prevent light from escaping and to help protect the building from any nearby explosions. During his short trip to the inn, James observed several fires still burning from the last bombing raid.

“Guten Aben,” the pretty older woman behind the counter greeted James as he entered the inn. “May I help you, sir?”

James smiled in a friendly way. “Yes, I will need a room for three nights. Would you have one available?”

The woman smiled. “Yes, we do. I am Gerta. Most of our rooms are being used by officers but we have a room still open.” James handed over the money to pay for the room for three nights. Gerta handed him the key and told him the room number.

Before he left she added one more thing. “The nearest bomb shelter is fifty meters to the left outside our front door. Those damn murderers fly in here and drop death amongst good, decent people. I don’t understand why they don’t mind their own business and go home!”

James made some appropriate mutterings of agreement and took his leave. He could understand her view. The common people on both sides of this war did not ask for this death and destruction. Most magical and Muggle people just wanted to live a life of peace. Unfortunately, sometimes to fight evil war became necessary.

Carrying suitcases filled with normal Muggle clothes and other travel items up to his room, James carefully watched his fellow guests as he made his way through the halls. James entered the room and closed the door behind him. Dropping the Muggle bags, James drew his wand and cast some subtle wards. Notice-Me-Not charms aimed at both magical and Muggle were placed on the room along with a ward to dampen the Dark Army’s ability to detect any magic used in the room.

James grabbed a quick dinner from the inn’s kitchen before retiring to his room for the night. He settled into his bed with his wand by his hand and his pistol under his pillow. Laying in his bed, James stretched out and did something unusual for him. He lowered his mental shields.

His scar had been giving him increasingly low-grade pains as he approached Hamburg. After years spent building up his Occlumency

skills to block out Voldemort, now he lowered them in a desperate bid to contact Tom Evans.

His shields lowered, James actively reached out through his scar to his son. *"Tom? Can you hear me? It's Dad, Tom."*

Nothing. He tried again.

"Tom, please hear me. Tom, if you don't answer me your mother will be quite cross with me. You know how she can be, Tom!"

"Dad? Is that you?"

James felt a thrill of triumph surge through him. *"Tom, are you okay? Do you know where you are?"*

He did not expect Tom's response. *"Get out of my head! I won't fall for this trick! I won't tell you what you want to know! My father isn't here!"*

James felt Tom struggling to raise his shields. *"Tom Evans, stop it! My real name is Harry James Potter!"*

There was a pause over the link. Very few people knew that name. *"Dad, is that really you?"*

Laughing in his relief, James answered, *"You didn't think I would let them take you, did you? Besides, Snuffles and Nagini have been driving me crazy. I had to get you back."*

"Thank Merlin, you are here, Dad. They are getting ready to move me next week. I heard something about Durmstrang. They keep asking me about Salazar's research into immortality. Dad, I don't know anything about that!" James could hear the desperation in Tom's voice.

"I know, Tom. I am going to get you out tomorrow night. What happened from your point of view? Can you tell me about where you are being held?"

Tom described what happened at the apothecary. *"I think I was asleep for a week. I kind of remember flying over water and then being someplace that smelled like the back end of a lorry. The first real thing I remember was driving in a car towards a building."* Tom gave James his brief impressions of the building he was being held in. James could feel Tom shrug through the link. *"I only saw it briefly from the outside. It looked like a rundown warehouse. That evil witch Christina is here. She has my wand. She keeps asking if I know the Count. She is infatuated with you, Dad. You have a psycho fan-girl."*

"They're all psycho," James snorted. "Tell me about the inside of the warehouse."

"It reminds me of St. Mungo's. Everything is white. I've managed to get out of my room a couple of times. I almost made it out once before the Psycho Witch arrived." Tom grinned through the link. *"My furry friend really confused them. I placed some Ashwinder eggs in newt jelly. I dropped it into a flask of Basilisk venom. Ten minutes later the whole lab exploded. They were so busy I almost made it out the front door."*

James chuckled at the image. *"The Count congratulates Mr. Fleetfoot on his excellent prank. But he reminds Mr. Fleetfoot that he must be careful to prevent the knowledge of his alternate form from being learned by our opponents."*

"You gave me my Marauder name!" Tom's excitement radiated through the link. *"Mr. Fleetfoot thanks the Count for his approval and will take his admonishment under advisement."*

"Be ready for tomorrow night, Speedy. I have your extra wand. I will have a couple friends get your wand to you whilst I create a distraction. They will bring you to our meeting point."

"How will I know who they are?"

James grinned. *"You'll know them. Trust me. Now get some rest. You're going to need it before we can get home."*

"Okay, Dad." Tom paused for a moment. "Dad?"

“Yes, Tom?”

In a small voice Tom asked, *“What happened to Xurana? I thought she was my friend.”*

James felt angry all over again for the hurt he heard in his son’s voice. *“Acturus Black used potions and manipulated her into luring you out of Hogwarts.”* James then explained all they had found out about the abduction.

“Thanks, Dad. It helps a little that she didn’t do this to me entirely willingly. Not much but some. And thanks for coming for me.”

James felt proud tears in his eyes. *“You’re welcome, son. Now go to sleep.”*

27 July 1943 – Hamburg

James lay on the roof of a building closest to the warehouse Tom was being held in. The Muggle field glasses in his hand allowed James to survey the building for possible defenses without getting too close. A black rucksack lay next to him holding Tom’s spare wand, another Invisibility Cloak, shrunken brooms and other magical items he may need.

Below his observation post, several guards, probably wizards, were visible outside the building. The building had a large main door with an office door nearby. No fence surrounded the building but a faded line around the building indicated that a number of wards existed.

A German vehicle passed by the warehouse. One of the guards raised a casual hand to wave in a familiar fashion as the staff car passed. James had learned a number of German army troops were also in the area to guard the major German port city. Several anti-aircraft batteries were set up in the area.

After his conversation with Tom, James did not get any sleep that night. In his bat form, he flew through the city looking for buildings that matched Tom’s description. The city was a mass of confusion as air raid sirens had gone off as a wave of British bombers approached.

Thunderstorms prevent the raid from occurring but the chaos helped further conceal the bat investigating the city.

At three in the morning James came across a heavily defended warehouse building on the edge of the manufacturing district near the working class area known as Hammerbrook. It looked like a dozen other buildings he had seen except for one thing. It had wards.

The bat felt the wards as a vague pressure as he crossed the outer boundary. Recognizing the pressure, James turned abruptly to fly back the way he came. The next hour was spent observing the building and surrounding area in bat and wolf form. Finally, at five in the morning, James returned to his room to sleep.

A one-armed young man in the clothes of a typical German laborer made his way through the streets of Hamburg. The many German troops in the area either nodded politely to the man who was obviously a disabled war vet or at worst ignored him. It was late in the afternoon and much of the evening shift of workers were making their way to the various factories turning out much needed war materials for the war effort. Tanks, artillery, guns and bullets were made alongside bandages, clothing and boots. Hamburg and the surrounding area provided a great deal of support to the German war machine.

James had made his way to the building he now watched from. It was 18:00 (6 PM) when he reached his vantage point. An invisibility cloak lay on top of him as he watched the building across from him. It was an unusually warm, dry day of 30c (about 86f). James had asked the innkeeper what time the sunset and was told about 21:30 (9:30 PM). James planned to study the building and its protections until after sunset. Once it was dark enough he would see about getting his son free.

A couple of twinges came through the scar as the day progressed into evening. They felt more like boredom and irritation than anything serious. More than anything, the clarity of the impressions assured James he had the right building.

James mused on the increased sensitivity of the link since forcing it open last night to talk to his son. At Hogwarts the occasional twinge

or random image came through when Tom was feeling particularly emotional, but today either Tom was feeling particularly annoyed or the link had become that much stronger. Possibly both, James conceded to himself. After all, knowing you are going to be rescued that night would probably put one on edge.

Circling the building several times, James noted the number of guards (8) and their typical patrol routes. All of the guards were roaming and seemed to be moving in a random pattern, but after a couple of hours James learned they all had particular places they liked to walk or take breaks. James planned to wait until 2 in the morning to start his entry into the warehouse. That should give the guards plenty of time to get comfortable and bored.

ADAD

It was just before 23:30 (11:30 PM) when James heard it. He was all prepared to start his assault on the warehouse when alarms started to blare all throughout the city.

The easily identifiable alarm was a shrill sounding wail that brought a jolt of adrenalin to the hearts of all who heard it. As if to confirm one's worst fears, giant spotlights reached up towards the clouds moving in search patterns. These actions announced to everyone exactly what was going on. Allied bombers had been sighted and were headed this way.

James cursed softly under his breath. He had mixed feelings about the raid. It was highly probable the warehouse was protected from aerial bombs. But the activity would distract both the magical guards and any Nazi troops that would be normally available to reinforce them. However, having to flee through a massive bombing raid and its aftermath with his sixteen year old son did not make him happy.

Hearing the distant rumble of AA guns firing in the distance, James decided now was the time to make his move.

James moved carefully back from the roof edge he had made his observation post. Once clear, he folded his cloak up and placed it in a pocket. With a final check of his equipment, James changed into his bat form.

The bat fluttered down to a dark corner on the side of the building. With a final sonic pulse, the bat's radar confirmed that no guards were in the immediate area. A heartbeat later James stood in its place.

A charm cast on his glasses allowed James to see the wards protecting the warehouse. Most were standard wards found on many magical dwellings. A Notice-Me-Not charm and a Muggle-Repelling charm mixed with a bomb protection ward most German and British wizards used. A couple wards were not so typical. One seemed to be designed to alert the guards if anyone with a magical core breached the wards. The second seemed to be designed to keep something in.

The first ward James felt he could puncture long enough to stealthily enter the grounds, but the second unknown ward had an odd flavor to it. James had seen wards in the Ministry designed to keep prisoners from escaping. He had expected to see that type of ward here also. But this ward's magic seemed to be slightly off, like it was a musical piece being played perfectly but the instrument was slightly off key.

James started to hear bombs falling in the distance. The RAF had started their bombing runs. The explosions seemed to be getting closer. If he was going to do this, James did not have a lot of time to piss away.

Focusing on the wards, James released his magic onto a single point of the ward. During the Horcrux hunt, Bill Weasley taught Harry, Ron and Hermione about wards and how to bypass them. As a Gringotts Curse Breaker, Bill worked to permanently remove ancient curses to allow the goblins or their clients free access or use of a place or object. The Trio were only concerned with piercing the wards long enough to remove the Horcrux or strike at the Death Eaters so Bill gave them focused training in that area. The Department of Mysteries also provided training to its agents.

In his mind he imagined a drill turning against a board. He felt his magic spinning as he pressed lightly on the ward's magic. He had to press firmly enough to move through the ward, but softly enough not to cause the ripples in the magic that would trigger the alarm. The

spinning of the magic helped spread out the ripples and keep the force applied even.

James felt his magic pierce the ward. The opening was only the diameter of a pin, but it was something. Keeping the magic spinning, James started slowly pushing the hole larger until he would be able to fit through the gap.

A series of explosions occurred within a block or so of the warehouse. It sounded like an entire Lancaster payload had 'walked' through the town. If he had looked, James would have seen flames already rising from the other side of the building he'd watched from all day. The anti-aircraft guns were firing as quickly as possible to make the RAF pay for the attack.

James tried to maintain his calm and focus as the sounds of the attack came closer. The gap in the wards grew bit by bit until he was willing to risk stepping through. If another witch or wizard had been present, James would have had them hold the gap while he entered in his much smaller bat form. Alone, James stepped carefully but quickly through the gap, balancing not tripping the ward and not getting caught partially through the closing gap.

The sky lit up as James reached the wall of the warehouse. Bombs landed all around the warehouse in a brilliant display of lights and sound. Fires were now burning in a number of buildings all around the area.

James moved stealthily towards the main door of the warehouse. The two guards standing outside the door were caught up watching the Muggle battle between the bombers and the city's defenders. It was an understandable distraction but one for which they would pay dearly.

Two small blades, perfectly balanced for throwing, were extracted from sheaths on James's vest. A silent, modified Banishing Charm sent the first blade flying further and faster than they could normally be thrown. The charm guided the blades directly to the targets the caster kept in his sight.

In this case the target was the neck of the guard standing furthest from James. The man was actually turned slightly towards James. If he turned from watching the attack, the Unspeakable's cover would be blown. The knife impacted just at the base of the throat, the blade's passage severing the windpipe and preventing any sound from escaping.

The second knife approached from the side of the target. The man had just one second to note the distress of his partner when the knife entered his throat from the side. This blade severed the carotid artery stopping all blood flow to the brain. Blood sprayed everywhere. He joined his partner on the ground in the next instant.

James approached the two downed guards. A muttered word and a wand tap changed both bodies into wooden blocks. A *Scrougify* later, all evidence of the Count's attack were removed. The blocks were kicked to the side. In several hours the transfiguration would end and the bodies return to normal. However by that time any need for stealth here would be long gone.

The large main doors of the warehouse had a Judas gate. An office door stood immediately to the left of the large doors. James viewed both of them for wards or other charms. Nothing was visible. Carefully opening the office door, James slipped inside.

The warehouse reception area appeared like a average office area for a Muggle business of the time. A small receptionist's desk stood facing the door and guarded another door behind it. A couple chairs with magazines on a small table between them completed the illusion.

James crept to the inner door. It shimmered in his charmed sight with a variety of charms and wards. Deciding there were too many wards on the door to break in a short time, James walked along the wall to a spot several feet to the right of the door.

Working for the Department of Mysteries, James learned that many wizards and witches cast protections on their doors, but often times forget about the rest of the building. An attacker could take advantage of that if he were unconcerned with stealth and deniability. A quick magical scan of the wall confirmed a lack of magical barriers or alarms on the wall itself.

James cast a Silencing Charm on the wall. He pulled a small vial of Dragon Blood from a pocket and made a circle on the wall. One of the uses of Dragon Blood Albus and Nickolas Flemmel discovered was to contain spell energy and focus. James pointed his wand at the center of the circle and cast an Explosive Hex. The Silencing Charm prevented the sound of the wall from being heard elsewhere in the warehouse. The Blood acted to focus the spell onto a relatively limited area. The spell and the Blood acted like a Muggle shaped charge to create a round hole through the wall.

James dove through the hole and rolled to his feet. His wand had been in his hand the whole time and was ready as he stood up.

Two Soldiers lay stunned on the floor. The explosion of the wall took them by surprise. In their shock, they failed to notice the Count's entry into the room. As he passed, James hit both with Stunners, summoned their wands and snapped them.

The room proved to be a small security office. A schedule on the wall noted a total of six staff for that night. The two removed outside plus these two left only two more security wizards.

James opened the office door and glanced into the hall outside. The hall was decorated like a very well to do inn or guesthouse. The place looked like more of a wizarding R&R (rest and recovery) center than a prison. Magical lights lit the hall in a warm glow. At the end of the hall James could see what looked like a common room with chairs and couches. Again, James's senses felt something odd in the magic around him. That 'out-of-tune' feeling was much stronger in the building than he detected in the ward outside.

Sudden pain shot through James's scar. "*Dad, they just came to take me away!*"

Opening the door, James slipped into the hall. He moved at a deliberate pass down the hall. Not fast enough to charge blindly into a trap, but stealth was not high on his priorities now either.

In the lounge, James found Tom being held between the two unaccounted guards. The guards had their wands pointed at Tom's head. An older, heavily scared wizard stood next to them. James

tagged him as an evil version of Moody. But it was the person standing next to the wizards and Tom that attracted James's attention.

"Let him go, Christina."

The low growl startled all of the other occupants in the room except Tom. 'Evil Moody' and Christina whirled in surprise as their hands went for their wands. They paused when they noticed the glowing end of James's wand pointed at them.

Christina smiled in an expression James could only describe as pleasure and anticipation. In a weird way, it reminded James of the look Hermione used to get when she received a new book. "Count, it is so nice to see you!"

"Have your men let the boy go."

The older Dark Wizard sneered at James. "My Lord has ordered this boy's recovery. Once he learns his true heritage and all My Lord can teach him, he will be a great asset to My Lord's plans. Run whelp, before you pay the price for challenging his commands."

James snorted. "Do people really talk like that? Let the boy go or you get the first curse, old man."

Christina's eyes lit with pleasure and anticipation. "Oh, let me fight him. He can teach me so much."

Without removing his eyes from James, the Dark Wizard snarled at her. "Our Lord has assigned you the task of getting him this boy. You will not act for your own pleasure. I will allow My Lord's slave to deal with this Unspeakable."

Christina turned to glare at the wizard. "You don't order me, Fin."

"You will go now or Our Lord will make you suffer for all eternity."

James used the distraction to cast a Piercing Hex at one of the wizards holding his wand on Tom. The silver bolt of light flashed towards its target only to smash into a red-hued shield that flared to life just short of the target.

The debate ended as Fin used Christina's distraction with James's attack to hit Christina with a wandless spell that threw into Tom. Tom and the Dark Witch fell into a heap on the floor. At a barked command from Fin, one of the guards reached down to grab them and activated a Portkey.

James looked in despair at the spot that a second ago his son stood.

"So, you are the great Count. I am Fin Sternis. I am my Lord's Ritual Master. I have heard so much about you. I am looking forward to this."

James turned his glare at the wizard responsible for preventing him from getting his son back. "You just made a mistake. A very serious mistake."

The wizard gave James a sneering grin. "Oh, I am sure. By the way, would you like to meet my Lord's slave?" A pulse of magic passed by James. He recognized the signature as the 'out-of-tune' magic he had been sensing.

A low rumble was heard from the room on the other side of the Dark Wizard and the remaining guard. The guard looked scared but a determined look remained on his face.

The door exploded out into the lounge. Sternis stepped back from between James and the door.

What stepped into the room looked like a nightmare image. The figure stood at least two meters tall. It looked vaguely human except for a head that looked like a parody of bull mixed with a wolf. Two curved horns rose out of its skull to curl along the sides of its head with pointed wolf ears rising up on either side of the horns. A canine-like snout revealed a mouthful of wickedly sharp looking teeth. Its skin looked blackened and burnt. Large cracks in the skin appeared as the creature walked forward revealing its feet ended in hooves. The creature moved like a squat tank. Its arms and legs were twice as thick as normal human proportions.

It was a creature James never expected to see. Indeed even most witches and wizards believed they were mythological. Only Remus's

Defense Against the Dark Arts class ever mentioned them. And that was only in passing. An instinctual primal fear rose up to grip James's heart.

"You would dare this?" James gasped. Albus had told him but he never really believed it on an emotional level. "You have brought demons through a gate?"

The Dark Wizard chuckled evilly. "Once my Lord has ascended and completed the Pact, we shall join with the Others to dominate this world forever!"

The building suddenly shook as a series of bombs exploded just outside the wards. Plaster dust filled the room as the building shook.

The demon let out a roar at the disturbance and backhanded the guard. The man flew a short distance back hitting the wall. A sickening crack could be heard as he hit. He slid down the wall to floor leaving an impression on the wall from his impact.

For the first time, the wizard Fin Sternis turned his complete attention on the demon he'd released into the room. A look of intense concentration crossed his face as he locked wills with the demon. The demon seemed to pause to glare at the Dark Wizard. Its large, clawed hands pumped several times as the mental battle raged.

James used the distraction to start backing out of the room. No matter who won, this was not going to be a healthy place for him to be. Once he'd backed out of the room, James moved quickly down the hall. James reached the door he had bypassed and destroyed it with a Reducto. The alarms tied to the wards started to scream out but James did not pay attention to them. No one was left to pay attention to them anyway.

A glance out the window of the warehouse showed the utter destruction caused by the bombing raid. Outside the warehouse's ward boundaries, the entire area was aflame. The building James had watched from was a pile of rubble from a pair of direct hits. It looked like a scene from Hell.

The thought reminded James of the creature and battle going on behind him. It was time to get moving.

ADAD

James's departure had gone unnoticed. Fin Sternis locked all of his concentration on the contest with the demon. Lord Grindelwald used wards to lock his Slaves in this plane of existence. Once he dominated their wills the special wards kept them from trying to escape. It also allowed him to pass their control on to his human servants. The controls were built into the building's wards allowing them to share energy.

Unfortunately, neither Grindelwald nor his followers ever seriously considered the possibility that a major Muggle bombing raid would occur at the same time the demon attempted to regain its freedom. The bomb repulsion and other protection wards were being strained to their limit by the bombs and the fires they caused. Their need sapped magic away from the Demon Ward.

Fin Sternis was a rather powerful Dark Wizard on par with the future's Lucius Malfoy. However, he did not have nearly the power or, more importantly, the will of Grindelwald. Strain as he would he could not make up for the deficit of the weakened Ward. The alarms caused by James's exit were the final straw.

Sternis's attention wavered for a moment as the ward alarms sounded through the building. He glanced over to where he had assumed the hated Count still stood. The glance was enough.

With a roar of triumph the demon reached out and grabbed the wizard in a clawed hand. Sternis shrieked in agony as the demon's other hand disembowel him with a single slash. The demon grabbed the dark wizard's head and gave a slight tug. With a slight pop, the head came loose.

The demon dropped the body and head and crouched in anticipation. Through eyes never meant for this reality, the demon watched an intangible force floated out of the body. The force could be described as a cloud, albeit a dark, forbidding looking one. The demon made a sound of malicious pleasure as its captor's soul floated in front of it.

The demon's magic grabbed the soul to keep it from escaping for its assigned destination. The demon opened its mouth sucking the force into it. A faint scream could be heard as the demon consumed the wizard's soul.

Its feast done, the demon looked longingly at the body of the guard. The guard's soul was long gone. The demon could sense two additional souls nearby. They were dim but more than acceptable after its long starvation. It remembered the other mortal who had been here was bright with life. That one would make a worthy feast. The two dim ones would come first. Then it would find the bright one.

ADAD

James used a Bubble-Head Charm and a Flame Freezing Charm as he ran through the bombed out streets of Hamburg. A number of bodies lay scattered on the street as he passed. Many of the buildings burned wildly as the firefighting crews were either dead or busy fighting the infernos in other parts of the city.

An explosion occurred a distance behind James. He turned to look back. The warehouse front was in pieces as the demon emerged from within. The creature raised its hand and unleashed a stream of Hellfire at the wards.

The wards flared as the energy of the demon's magic struck it. James could see the normal hemisphere shape twisting as the energy poured into it. It looked like a soap bubble someone was poking with a stick. Like the soap bubble, someone finally pushed too hard.

The wards crashed under the onslaught. The Hellfire exploded past the collapsed wards and struck one of the burning buildings. It was like pouring fuel onto the fire. The building seemed to melt as James watched in stunned disbelief.

The heat from the fires of the surrounding buildings combined with the demon's Hellfire caused the warehouse to combust into flames. The sight knocked James out of his shock as he resumed his retreat.

The superheated gusts of wind prevented James from assuming his bat form and James was unsure if the Freeze Flame Charm would

continue to work if he changed into either of his forms anyway. Broom travel would probably be too dangerous as well. A broom's bristles were rather dry. The manufacturers used charms to protect against fire, but this environment was way outside anything they realistically would have expected. A gust of superheated air could easily cause them to catch on fire. He had tried to Apparate soon after crossing the warehouse's wards, but something blocked his leaving.

A sudden tickle caused James to throw himself to the side just before a ball of Hellfire passed through the space he just had been. The Freeze Flame charm had no effect on the heat of the Hellfire. James felt the fabric of his cloak start to smolder as it passed.

James jumped back to his feet as the demon roared a challenge from its place in front of the warehouse.

The demon deliberately walked towards the former boundary of the wards. It paused for a second and then stepped over the line. It gave James a triumphant, hungry glare. At a deliberate pace, it started walking towards James.

For the first time since walking out to face Voldemort for the final time, James felt true fear when he first saw the demon. Yes, he could have died fighting a dozen times since then. Chance played a role in any battle. But none of his opponents in this time could hold a candle to the pure power and ruthlessness to the Dark Lord that ruined Harry's childhood. The demon however caused something deep within James to quiver in fear.

As the demon crossed the former wards, James set that fear aside. He had assumed the wards would hold the demon back if the Dark Wizard failed to control it. Now both the wizard and the wards had failed. An unfettered demon had been unleashed in Hamburg tonight. If it wasn't stopped thousands of Muggles would die.

James cast several protection spells on himself as he stepped into the middle of the street. Normally his training said that was not a good place to be but the chances of a burning building falling on him were too great to stand near one for cover. James summoned several large pieces of rubble and transfigured them into large granite slabs.

Hopefully the slabs would provide a measure of protection from the Hellfire.

Watching the demon approach, James started to mutter under his breath. "All I wanted was to live a quiet life with my family. I just wanted to be happy. But no, I had to get dragged into it. I wanted to teach my kids, watch them grow up and some day meet my parents. Although I admit that would have been weird to meet them as an old man when they are little kids. But still..."

The demon started throwing balls of Hellfire as it closed to within fifty meters. The granite worked as James hoped although they were growing increasingly warm to the touch. For its part, the demon was confused. The human was neither running in fear or attempting to engage it in a contest of dominance. In its experience humans did one or the other. Confused, the demon unleashed a column of pure Hellfire against the nearest of the granite slabs. The sudden infusion of heat energy caused the slab to explode.

James felt a sharp jab in his side as he hurriedly threw himself behind one of the other slabs. Small, jagged pieces of granite flew past like shrapnel. Several left long bloody gouges across James's leg.

As James used the slab to stand himself back up, he could see the demon preparing to unleash yet another column of Hellfire. Taking a wand in each hand, James prepared himself.

The column closed half the distance to James as it was met by another force. James knew he could not block the Hellfire. He remembered his experience with Grindelwald and what Albus told him, but he had to try something.

A force of wind intersected the Hellfire at a 90 degree angle. The wind knocked the Hellfire off course. James tried to use the wind to twist the Hellfire back at the demon and kill it with its own magic. However the plan worked too well.

The wind and Hellfire twisted around each other forming a whirling pillar of flame that reached high into the sky. The Hellfire tornado superheated the already burning air into unheard of levels. The winds

sucked the air up to feed the growing fire storm. The normal fires of the area buildings leapt up to join this celebration of flame.

The demon released its stream of Hellfire and gazed up at the fiery tornado in a look of longing, like it was looking at home. The whirling tower of fire took on a life of its own. It started moving away from the site of the magical battle in search of fresh fuel.

James cursed softly at what he had inadvertently done. An already catastrophic raid would now rise to be unequaled until the start of the Atomic Age in a couple years.

The demon turned its attention back to James. In a roar of excitement and anticipation, the demon started to run in a loping gait directly for James. James realized the creature planned to use its claws rather than standoff and hit him with more Hellfire. Reaching into his rucksack, James pulled out an old friend.

The young wizard stepped out from behind the granite slab as the demon approached. His wands were away. In his right hand lay a sword thought lost to the ages. James convinced the Sorting Hat before leaving England to release the sword. The fact he now knew he was descended from Gryffindor and Ravenclaw helped quite a bit. Watching the demon approach, James knew he had to end this fast. The demon would be stronger than him and have a greater endurance.

The demon swung a clawed hand in James's direction. His Quidditch trained reflexes allowed him to dodge while taking a swing at the demon's knee. The magical sword pierced the demon's flesh causing it to roar out in surprise and pain.

It swung its arm at James to force him back. James saw the arm coming and instinctively raised his arm to protect his head from the blow. The demon was off-balance when it swung and could not bring its full force to the blow. Still it was enough to snap James's left arm and drive it into his head.

James felt disoriented from the blow and allowed the force of the impact to spin him around. He added his own strength to his spin and

allowed the sword to flash out. Completing his spin, James came to a defensive position in an attempt to clear his head.

As his vision returned to normal, James looked to locate his demonic opponent.

The demon kneeled on the street with one hand holding its throat whilst its other helped hold it up. James moved quickly to circle the demon before it could recover. Sliding in alongside it James swung the sword down in a brutal chopping motion.

ADAD

The Muggle residents of Hamburg would later call the devastating raid on their city the German Hiroshima. The fire reached a temperature of over 800C (1,500F) with winds over 240 km/h (150 mph). The fire rapidly consumed oxygen causing the asphyxiating deaths of many taking refuge in the air raid shelters. (Those who were not cooked to death in the heat.) The heat of the *Feuersturm* was so great the asphalt on the roads caught on fire.

Twenty-one square kilometers (8 sq.miles) of the city was destroyed in that single raid. An estimated 40,000 people were killed in the raid. 1.2 million people later fled the city fearing further similar attacks.

The Muggles would blame the terrific firestorm on the unusually warm, dry conditions. No Muggle witnesses survived in the devastated area to talk about the cloaked man fighting a desperate battle with a demon. No one could report on the man's efforts to prevent the demon from killing even more innocent people. All signs of the fight were consumed by the fire's rage. Even the bones of the demon were incinerated.

12 August 1943 – Emergency Shelter outside Hamburg

The smell of antiseptic and burned flesh filled James's nose as he struggled to wake. The murmur of German voices filled his ears. Very carefully, James opened his eyes.

A scowling, no-nonsense looking woman in a creased nurse's uniform noticed his eyes opening. "You are awake. Good, we need the bed."

"Where am I?" James asked in a croaking voice.

The nurse gave him a small glass of water with a straw. "You are in a temporary shelter set up in a Gymnasium outside Hamburg. You were found with a broken arm, two broken ribs and a minor concussion. Some minor burns but most of the city had those." She shrugged. "At least, those who survived," she added. "You've been in a coma since you were found."

"How long?"

"Fifteen days."

The nurse started to poke and prod James with no further comments. She ignored James's protests. "Okay, the ribs have started healing. Your arm will take a bit longer."

"When can I get out of here," James asked.

"The doctor will have to check you out before discharging you. Then you will have to see the clerk from the Gestapo to get set of replacement papers. You lost yours in the fire." She patted James on the shoulder. "Don't worry. It is strictly routine. Many people in the Feuersturm lost their papers."

James nodded in a seemingly absent fashion. Internally was a different story. 'But most of those people didn't have papers from a turned Dark Soldier. I have no idea how to fake the process of getting a new set. Time to leave.'

A couple of hours later, the doctor informed James later he would be released in the morning. The records clerk from the government would meet with him when the doctor discharged him.

James waited until late in night before making his move. He summoned the night nurse with a vague request for a drink of water. Five minutes later, James recovered his rucksack from the storage

area and Oblivated the nurse to believe her patient died suddenly during the night. With a sigh, the nurse processed the normal paper work to record the loss of another victim of the war. She never noticed James slipping out of the ward.

Tom had told his father where they planned to take him after Hamburg. With a little luck they believed the Count had died at the hands of the demon and maintained their plans. James was going to get his son back but first he would have to visit some friends. He was going to need some help for this.

A/N: The descriptions of the bombing of Hamburg on the night of 27 July 1943 in this chapter are all true. If anything, I toned it down. It was actually part of a series of raids but this was by far the worst. Unfortunately, in real life we did it to ourselves and did not have a wizard fighting a demon we could blame it on. At least, none that I know of...

Chapter 34 – Eye of the Storm

27 July 1943 – Durmstrang

Tom felt someone fall on him in the chaos in the lounge after the appearance of his father. He struggled to get free when he felt the familiar tug behind his navel as a Portkey activated.

An instant later, Tom found himself someplace else.

Two strong hands grabbed Tom's arms and pulled him up from under Christina. The Dark Witch stood up with an angry scowl on her face as she dusted snow off her clothes.

"He had no right!" she growled. "The Count is mine. I swear if the Count doesn't kill that weasel then I will!" Her mutterings continued but Tom ignored her.

Tom glanced over his shoulder at the person holding him. Then he looked up. At 16 and a half, Tom stood 5' 9". The person holding him was easily seven feet tall! Straining his neck to look up at the person holding him, Tom had two thoughts. The first was, 'Sweet Merlin, it's a girl!' Followed by, 'She must be half troll!'

The woman holding Tom towered over him. Her hands felt like steel traps on his biceps. When Tom looked up the woman smiled with a friendly grin. Only an odd ridge on her forehead and troll-like ears hinted at her mixed blood status. At least in her face. Her size and extreme musculature practically shouted it. Where Hagrid as a half-giant was rather bulky, this woman was built like an oversized gymnast. Tom guessed she would be much faster than her size alone suggested.

"Christina, it is so nice to have you back! It has been much too long!" the half-troll woman greeted the Dark Witch. "And who is the handsome young wizard?" Her voice had a gravelly rasp to it.

Christina dropped off her mutterings to glare up at Tom's captor. "His name's Tom Riddle, Helena. He is the one Our Lord sent me to England to get."

“My name is Tom Evans,” Tom growled back.

His comment was ignored as Helena grinned at Christina. “Ah, methinks someone is a bit on the grumpy side. Did someone have a duel and not invite you to it?”

Christina started telling the half-troll woman exactly what she thought of her observations. Tom was impressed with her command of Muggle swearing. In the month he had been the unwilling companion with her, he had never seen the Dark Witch lose her temper like this. A part of Tom’s brain wanted to take notes.

Helena continued to grin throughout the rant. After five minutes, Tom felt a deep rumbling laugh coming from the large witch behind him. “You haven’t changed since our First Year, my dear. You are still too easy to wind up.”

Christina glared up at the large woman. “And you are still just as annoying as ever. How they ever made you a professor I will never know.”

The unperturbed response came in a dry observation. “Well, I may scare the Firsties with my size, but unlike some I could name, I’ve never blasted one into a wall.”

Almost unwillingly, Christina allowed a small cold smile on her face. “True, but you did trick him into grabbing my bum. Come on, it is too cold out here to talk about old times.”

It was only as the giant Helena guided Tom after Christina that he really looked around at his surroundings.

The path they were walking on hugged the side of a rugged mountain. Snow covered the path and the mountains around them. They arrived at the end of the path. It was too dark to see how far the drop was but Tom suspected it was very far. It was July and they were still above the snowline. Tom suspected permanent Warming Charms were active but did not cause the snow to melt.

The path was only about ten feet wide as they walked along the mountain. Magical torches set into the mountainside lit their progress.

The torches sprang to life as they approached but then extinguished themselves after they passed. The path moved higher up the mountain until it reached a plateau. It was too dark to make out many details, but Tom saw a large castle with a single large tower rising up from the middle. Through the torchlight, Tom could only see the outline but he suspected it was larger than Hogwarts.

A pair of large stone doors swung silently open to allow them access into the entrance hall of the castle. The walls and ceiling were made of a rough dressed stone. The floor was made out of the same stone but it was worn down to a smooth surface. The entrance hall was lined with various banners. Tom recognized the various House symbols of the older Pureblood families of Central and Eastern Europe.

"I had your room prepared for you today, Christina. Our new friend here will be in the guest quarters down the hall from you."

The Dark Witch never broke stride. "Excellent. It will be nice to finally sleep in my own bed again after far too long in England."

Tom allowed himself to be marched through the castle and into the base of a tower in the center of the school. An open shaft lay in the center of the room. Christina walked into the open hole without slowing a bit. Christina rose into the air at a rapid pace and was soon out of sight. Tom looked questioningly at Helena.

She understood his unspoken question. "The tower's magic knows what level you want to go to. Sort of like a Muggle lift but without the cables or the car." Against his will, Tom was impressed. It was a neat piece of magic.

Tom and Helena stepped into the magical lift and immediately started to rise. They ascended quickly and with a little hopping sensation found themselves standing on a ledge about halfway up the tower. Christina was standing there waiting for them.

They led them to an open stout-looking wooden door. They pushed Tom through. Before closing the door, Helena said, "The wardrobe has proper clothes for you. I suggest you dress warmly. I used the Warming Charms tonight but they will not be left on. A house elf will

bring you breakfast in the morning. Sleep well.” Then she closed the door and left.

Tom looked around the room. A large bed filled one corner of the room. It was piled high in thick blankets. A desk with a bookcase sat on the far wall. A quick glance told Tom most of the books dealt with Dark Magic. A wardrobe sat nearby. A small door led into a bathroom.

Tom sank down onto the bed as he fought off despair. This morning he thought his father would be rescuing him and he would be heading home. But it had all gone pear shaped and now he was in an even worse position.

Although he was exhausted by the day’s events, sleep was a long time coming.

ADAD

Brilliant sunlight streamed through a single smallish window set in the bedroom wall as Tom woke the next morning. Curious, Tom wrapped a robe from the wardrobe around his shoulders and walked to the window. The small window did not allow Tom to see much but what he could see was incredible.

The Alps lay stretched out in a brilliant display. The mountains were snow-capped but Tom could just make out hints of green down near the tree line. The angle of the window did not allow any view of the school below him.

“And I thought Hogwarts was in the middle of nowhere!” Tom muttered.

Tom wandered over to the bookshelf and looked at the titles. One book was titled Mastering the Unforgivable. Next to it was one titled Using Blood Magic to Expand Magical Strength. One book was a philosophical argument there was no Dark Magic, only magic that weak wizards feared and could not control. Tom’s favorite title was The Dead Walk: A Beginner’s Guide.

“Hmm, subtle they are not,” Tom commented with a frown.

A pop announced the arrival of a house-elf with a breakfast tray. The elf wore a thick towel rather than the tea cozy Tom usually saw most elves wear.

"Me's is Squezzzy. Master Riddle like his breakfast now?" the elf asked.

"Yes, please. And my last name is Evans, not Riddle."

Squezzzy looked nervous. "Great Lord said your name is Master Riddle. I's have to do as master says!" The fear in the elf's voice increased with every word.

Tom raised a placating hand. "Okay, you can call me Master Riddle if you need to but how about just call me Tom when it is just the two of us." Tom gave the house-elf his most charming smile. His mum always said he belonged in Slytherin not because of his bloodline, but because of how deadly he wielded his smile to get what he wanted.

Squezzzy smiled back in a nervously. In a hesitant fashion, the elf nodded, "Okay Master Tommy I can do that, but only when we are alone."

"Brilliant! Now, let's see what you brought for my breakfast."

The elf summoned a small table to place the breakfast tray on. While the elf busied himself with the meal Tom forced himself to maintain the pleasant and positive outward appearance. Tom knew the elf would only work against his master in extraordinary circumstances. He had only heard of one who ever worked to thwart his master's expressed wishes. While he did not expect Squezzzy to act as Dobby did even a little bit of help or information would be useful.

Tom did have to admit the breakfast was delicious.

ADAD

Just before noon, Squezzzy appeared in the room again. Tom was sitting looking out the window. In truth he was bored to tears. With no wand and nothing to read but Dark Arts books, he had nothing better to do than stare out the window.

“Master Tommy, the Great Lord says you are to have lunch with him. Mistress Christina will be coming for you soon. You’s to be ready when she arrives.”

Tom felt a pit of dread in his stomach. A sudden jolt of fear shot through his body. As calmly as possible, Tom smiled. “Thank you, Squeazy. I will be ready.”

The elf departed with a smile, pleased with the new master’s politeness and friendliness.

Tom mechanically pulled out a set of nice robes to wear for the lunch. It was going to take Dad time to locate him and get him out. He needed to play for time.

“Sal, if you have any cunning to lend me this would be a good time to do it.”

ADAD

At exactly noon, the door to Tom’s room opened and Christina walked in. She immediately looked for Tom and saw him sitting by the window. Tom noticed she relaxed a bit when she saw him.

“Did you think I would try to ambush you when you opened the door?” Tom asked with a smirk. “We are on top of a bloody mountain in the middle of the Alps. I have no wand. Where the hell do you think I can go?”

“It didn’t stop you in Hamburg,” the witch observed.

“If I got out of the building there I could have easily hidden amongst the Muggles,” Tom sneered. “Where would I have to hide around here?”

Christina gave Tom a small nod as she conceded his point. “Come, the Great Lord waits for us to join him for lunch.”

The Dark Witch escorted Tom into a modest sized dining room. The room was functional with no ostentation. The table was rectangular and only sat six people. Something about the quality of the furniture

told Tom it was expensive but no more so than what the Potter's had in their dining room. But what caught Tom's attention was not the room itself, but the man sitting in the chair at the head of the table.

Tom knew the man was the same age as his Transfiguration Professor, but this man looked a bit older. He had wavy brown hair but Tom could see white streaks running out from both temples. Tom's biggest surprise was the man had an open, friendly face that looked like he laughed a lot. He looked more like a friendly shop clerk or teacher than the scariest Dark Lord in the last four hundred years.

"Come in, Tom. Come in." The Dark Lord stood and waved Tom and Christina into the room. Tom walked in while keeping an eye on the wizard. Tom could feel a very light probing of his mental defenses as he entered the room.

"It is so nice you could finally join us. The Heir of Slytherin here at my table. What a remarkable day. I went to Hogwarts too you know." The Dark Lord gestured to Tom to sit in the chair next to him.

Tom had debated pretending he had no knowledge of Grindelwald's background several times in his captivity. In the end, he decided acting completely ignorant would not be believable.

"This is an odd place to find a Ravenclaw," Tom commented as casually as he could manage.

The Dark Lord looked pleased. "You know my House. Tell me, what else have you researched about me?"

"Albert Ezekiel Grindelwald, Hogwarts class of 1861. Pureblood member of Ravenclaw."

The Dark Lord smiled in apparent amusement but Tom noticed the emotion was not reflected in his eyes. "I am sure you have heard some other things about me. After all, I know Albus still haunts my old school."

Tom shrugged, "The professor doesn't exactly bring up in class that his school friend and academic rival became a Dark Lord who is tearing Europe to bits."

Christina could not hold in her comments and jumped into the conversation. "They attempted to stop my Lord from learning about his true destiny. His pursuit of knowledge scared the sheep too weak to understand the whole picture."

Tom gave the Dark Witch a mocking look. "Of course, how dare they object to him opening a gate to the demon realm? Demons are simply loving, misunderstood creatures who would not hurt anyone."

Christina's face turned red during Tom's mocking comments. Her fingers flexed near the wand holster on her arm.

"And tell me, how is my other old friend, Thomas Potter. I understand your family is quite close to him." The Dark Lord diverted the conversation away from Christina, allowing her to collect herself.

Realizing he was not giving anything away, Tom said, "He is the closest thing to a grandfather I'll ever know. I'm sure you know that he adopted my family into the Potter clan. It is public information."

Grindelwald smiled in a self-satisfied way. "Thomas was always a most amusing chap. Not much for brains or power but always good for a laugh." The dark wizard leaned forward in his chair and asked, "Tell me where James Evans came from. The reports I have received on his comments about his past seemed most confused and contradictory." Tom felt the mental probing become more forceful. "I have not been able to even confirm his existence until he appeared in England."

Tom responded by strengthening his Occlumency shield. In a flat tone, Tom said, "Stay out of my mind." The pressure increased momentarily and then dropped to nothing.

Grindelwald looked somewhat pleased as he smiled at Tom. "You have very nice shields. You were well taught. I assume Albus taught you." Tom shrugged noncommittally letting Grindelwald read into it what he wanted. In fact, Dumbledore had nothing to do with his Occlumency training. Grindelwald smiled innocently. "I imagine that has been most helpful in resisting your family's curse. I mean your real family, Thomas Riddle. The curse that will drive you mad unless you embrace your dark side first."

“Actually, it is Tom Marvolo Riddle, not Thomas,” Tom commented in a dry, academic tone. “My birth-mum, Merope, was a bit mad. I’d bet she never realized that Tom is a Muggle nickname, not a proper one. Although compared to my late, unlamented uncle she was the soul of sanity.” Christina and the Dark Lord both looked momentarily shaken by Tom’s blunt, matter-of-fact statement.

“You knew Morfin Gaunt was your uncle?” Christina asked in a surprised voice.

“Yep,” Tom said in a happy voice. “I met him twice. Once, my father took me to meet my birth-father and his parents. We also visited my insane uncle. Actually, Tom Senior is a bit off too. Probably from the potion Merope gave him.” Tom shrugged at the thought like he couldn’t care less. “The second time was when your witch over there invaded Hogwarts and tried to kidnap my best mate. I watched as the Count shortened him by a head. Though I don’t think the crazy bastard even recognized me that time.”

Now his two “hosts” looked really shocked. No report had reached them about what happened in the Slytherin common room that night. They naturally assumed the Count defeated their people after he forced Christina to leave.

Realizing they were off-balance, Tom kept going. “I assume you were referring to the fabled “madness” the descendants of Slytherin are prone too? My father and I looked into it. We think it was just that the stupid Purebloods were inbreeding too much. Mum thinks the fact I am a half-blood will prevent that from happening to me. Besides, growing up in the Gaunt house would probably drive anyone insane if the stories Dad and I heard were true.”

The Dark Lord leaned back in his chair and considered the young wizard sitting at his table. Tom could not read him well but guessed this was not how the Dark Lord expected this conversation to go.

Grindelwald clapped his hands and called for food. The table was instantly filled with foods of all sorts. He gestured to Tom, “Please feel free to eat what you like.”

Tom took some food and started to eat. He kept his head down to avoid making eye contact. That would make it easier to keep his mental shields up.

Lunch was excellent. Christina tried twice to ask Tom to tell her about the Count's fight in the Slytherin common room. Tom tried to ignore her and focused on the food. Grindelwald ate in silence but watched Tom carefully.

When the Dark Lord finished eating, Christina noticed and stopped eating also. The witch glared at Tom until he set his fork down also.

Acting like he hadn't noticed the byplay, Grindelwald smiled at Tom. "I have decided to make you my apprentice. I sense you have a great deal of power and it leans to the Dark however you try to dismiss it. For the next month you will train under my dear Christina here. Then in the fall we will have you attend classes with our students here in Durmstrang."

The Dark Lord rose from his seat and started to walk out of the room. Before walking out the door, he turned back to Tom and said, "You will not be allowed to ever leave here except as my trusted apprentice. I need something only you can give me. You are intelligent enough to figure that out. So you know I won't kill you. I also suspect that attempting to rip the knowledge out of your brain will not avail me of anything useful. However, I trust I can come up with some creative ideas for punishing any resistance you give me."

2 August 1943

The last four days had been both very boring and also extremely tense for the sixteen year old wizard. Grindelwald and Christina made no more appearances. The only living creatures Tom saw were the house-elves who brought his meals. He never saw the same one twice so he could not build any kind of relationship with them.

For the first two days, Tom simply spent his time sleeping, practicing Occlumency, or looking out the small window. During his time in Hamburg he had been allowed a wizarding wireless and access to some English-language books on various topics. But now even those minor forms of entertainment absent.

On the third day of his isolation, Tom picked up the book of philosophical arguments in favor of the use of the Dark Arts. The isolation and boredom of the room was getting to him.

The book proved to be a humorous and thought provoking piece. The author talked about how any particular piece of magic could be misused for evil purposes and it was the wielder of the magic who put the stain of morality on events. The author admitted that some magical spells and potions were more easily abused than others but that didn't change the fact it was up to the wizard to determine if the magic was put to good or evil purposes.

An example the writer used was a Stunning Spell. The spell was widely seen by most as being a Light spell. After all, it allowed Aurors to capture criminals without doing any harm to them. However, it could also be used by kidnappers and rapists to help them achieve their Dark goals. Imperio was one of the Unforgivables, yet using it on the kidnapper who used the Stunner to safely recover the victim would be using a commonly held Dark curse to achieve a Light end.

Tom summed up the author's argument to be the end result of the magic justified the means. Or blame the magic's user for the results, not the magic itself. The arguments were seductive. Tom could see the author used very specifically written scenarios to illustrate the points he was trying to make. However, it was an argument at the end of the book Tom had the hardest time rebuking.

Would killing one person in cold blood to save a million people be justified? A thousand? A hundred? Ten? Tom could easily accept it to save a million people from an academic point of view. Setting the lower end of the bar was much harder. Then a nasty thought popped into Tom's mind.

Isn't this exactly what his father did when he came back to kill Tom Riddle? Harry Potter traveled to this time with the intent to kill an infant. The Chosen champion of the Light decided that killing a harmless infant was justified because of what that child *might* have grown up to do one day. The thought haunted Tom all night as he slept.

A small voice in his head insisted that it may have been Harry's intent to murder an infant, but James raised that child as his own. He had adopted him to keep him away from that path.

But the thought of Harry's *intent* stayed with him.

This morning Tom rose after a restless night's sleep. He kept dreaming of James Evans and Harry Potter fighting if an infant Tommy Riddle was to live or die. Seeing his baby self in a crib hanging above their battle like a piñata was very disturbing.

Tom received his breakfast from the now typical completely silent house-elf. To pass the time whilst he ate, Tom picked up a book of Dark dueling spells. The spells didn't seem too different from the spells James taught him. They would just do more damage to the target.

One spell was very similar to the Arrow Hex he had seen James use. The hex conjured three arrows and fired them at the target in either a tight or wide spread. Since most wizards focused on shields that stopped spell energy only, the arrows would not be stopped by the shields. However the Dark versions of the spell enabled the caster to cause them to be on fire or be made of silver or contain a paralyzing poison. The silver tipped arrows would really only be useful against werewolves and some other 'Dark' creatures. So why would this be a Dark spell? The poisoned arrows did not have a large arrowhead on it so would do little damage when hitting the target, but would leave the target unable to move. Too many arrow hits could cause the target's heart to stop but one could do that with Stunners too.

During his readings that morning, Tom never noticed when he called his father James rather than Dad in his thoughts.

Tom continued reading through the morning and up to lunch. He used the spoon from breakfast to practice the wand movements for the various spells he was reading. Lunch arrived and was absently eaten as he continued reading.

Lunch had just been cleared away when the door suddenly opened. The sudden noise startled Tom as he jumped away from the desk where he had been sitting reading. Christina walked into the room

closely followed by a severe looking woman with thick, curly hair pulled brutally back into a bun. Tom noticed her facial structure bore a strong resemblance to the Dark Witch that kidnapped him.

Christina threw Tom a mockingly polite smile. "Good afternoon, Mr. Slytherin. I trust you have found your room comfortable?"

"Mr. Slytherin? My last name is Evans. I could even see calling me Mr. Riddle to be annoying but Mr. Slytherin?" Tom scoffed.

The same polite smile answered Tom's comment. "The Great Lord does not want to call you by either that weak wizard's name who tried to keep you from your true heritage or the disgusting Muggle name of your father. You are the Heir of Slytherin so you deserve to carry his name."

Christina gestured to the woman who had accompanied her whilst Tom looked at her in silent disbelief. "Serena, meet the master's new apprentice, Tom Slytherin. Tom will be studying with me for the rest of the summer and then joining the Sixth years' classes once school starts."

The severe looking witch turned and seemed to study Tom for a moment. "Is he a worthwhile student?" she asked in a harsh voice.

Christina gave Tom a proud smile. "Mr. Slytherin received Outstandings in Defense, Transfiguration, Potions, Charms, and Arithmancy with Exceeds Expectations in Herbology, Magical Creatures, and Astronomy. I believe you will find him an excellent student." Christina's companion gave Tom a grudging nod of approval.

Through his uncertainty, Tom felt excited hearing how well he performed on his OWLS. The three EE's were slightly disappointing but they were still enough to get into the NEWT level classes. At least if he could get back to Hogwarts they would be.

Christina gestured to the witch with her and said, "Tom, allow me to introduce Our Lord's chief researcher and Durmstrang's librarian, Madam Raven. She is also my sister. While I am training you, she will

be providing you with study materials and overseeing your progress when I am unavailable.”

Tom looked at the intimidating librarian uncertainly. “It is nice to meet you, ma’am.” Being polite wouldn’t hurt.

“We will see if you truly earned those scores, Mr. Slytherin. I believe you will find me to be a demanding teacher. I expect you to put full effort into your studies.” Tom only nodded feeling intimidated.

Christina smiled in a satisfied way. “Come, Mr. Slytherin. I want to test your practical defense skills. I look forward to see the skills of a student the British Ministry feels as worthy of an O.”

Tom followed the two witches out of the room and back down the magical lift. The lift held them motionless for an instant until Christina said “Ground”. They dropped rapid to the ground and slowed just before touching the floor. They touched lightly on the stone floor and walked out of the tower.

By the daylight, Durmstrang had a dark, brooding feel. For a school sitting on top of a mountain, it felt like it was sitting in the dungeons. As a Slytherin, Tom was used to living in the dungeon, but this school felt even more underground. Where Hogwarts was decorated with magical paintings and suits of armour, statues of various Dark and dangerous creatures decorated the halls of Durmstrang. Werewolves, gargoyles, harpies and other creatures glared down from perches lining the halls.

“How many Firsties do you have to send home from recurring nightmares just walking in this place?” Tom asked in a cheeky voice. Madam Raven gave a disapproving sniff whilst Christina turned to give Tom a small smirk.

The witches led Tom out of the hall and into a classroom. The room was obviously used to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts. ‘Or probably to teach the Dark Arts.’ Tom thought wryly. A regulation dueling platform stood in the center of the room with a target range just beyond it. A wide open area with no dueling marks stood immediately next to the platform. Bleachers lined one wall allowing all three areas to be visible to spectators.

Christina led Tom into the middle of the open area as Serena settled onto the bleachers. "This is our training room for the older students. The platform and target areas use are obvious. This open area is used for teaching magical combat rather than dueling. A true enemy will not follow the forms before attacking you. Unlike Hogwarts, we believe in ensuring our students can defend themselves in real-life situations."

'You never saw James's training, you crazy witch,' Tom thought derisively. 'He only taught formal dueling as an afterthought.'

Christina took a couple steps away from Tom and then turned to face him. "Let's see how you'd do."

Tom dropped and rolled to the side before she even finished talking. A pair of spells Tom did not recognize passed through the space he had just been standing in.

Christina gave Tom a happy smile. "Oh, very good. You were ready and didn't wait for a formal challenge. Maybe that Professor Evans was not just a poseur. Here, catch."

Tom snatched his 13 and a half inch yew wand with a phoenix feather core out of the air. For the first time since Hogsmeade, Tom felt complete. Having the wand in his hand just felt right.

A quick *Protego* blocked the curse that came directly behind the wand's arrival. Tom slid to the side and released a quick "*Corycus!*" The Punch Spell created any area of high pressure air about the size of a man's fist that "punched" the target. It hit like a strong right hook and properly aimed could knock out teeth and break noses.

Christina dodged the unfamiliar spell but it caught the edge of her shield knocking her slightly off balance for a second. Before Tom could take advantage of the opportunity she released a Slicing Curse.

Tom's shields absorbed most of the curse but some of it came through leaving a gash across his thigh. He could feel blood starting to flow down his leg. His Occlumency training helped set the pain aside for the moment. Tom felt his anger start to rise. He muttered, "*Sagitto toxium*"

A flight of three arrows sprang from the yew wand. They spread out slightly catching Christina by surprise. She avoided two of the arrows but caught one in her right shoulder.

Christina looked down at the arrow in surprise. She pulled it out and looked at Tom as if Christmas had come early. "Oh, you wicked boy! Here for only four days and already you are using the Dark spells. I am so proud of you!"

She pointed her wand at her shoulder and muttered a spell. She looked up to see Tom had moved several steps further away from her. "That was very well done for your first attempt at the spell. You need to concentrate on the intent of the paralyzing agent. Yours was quite weak."

The Dark Witch dropped the arrow to the floor. Before it reached the floor, two curses were speeding directly at Tom. He barely was able to dodge them. For the next fifteen minutes, Tom struggled to stay up with his opponent. He collected a series of stings, cuts, welts and bruises all over his body. A slice to his forehead caused blood to flow down around his left eye.

Finally, a voice sliced through their fight. "Enough."

Tom turned and saw Madam Raven standing at the edge of the mat. "Christina, you let this go too far. We were only to test him, not engage in a fight to the death. He proved worthy of his Owl with that arrow he got past your defenses." Her dry voice was emotionless but she sounded slightly disappointed.

Christina gave her sister a mock pout. "But Serena, I wanted to see what the boy can do. I still think he is holding back on me."

The librarian looked at Tom as if examining a bug. "Then he is a fool. Look at the boy. We shall need to go straight to the hospital wing now if I expect him to be any good for testing tomorrow."

Tom had been holding back some. The specialized training he received would be recognizable to Christina as the Count's favorite tactics and style. He refused to let Grindelwald and Christina know the full extent of his powers.

“Oh, very well,” Christina conceded. “We will take him to the Healer and then do our tour of the school.” She threw Tom a sly grin. “After all, we can’t have him getting lost during his escape attempts can we.”

ADAD

The two witches led Tom a short distance down the hall and then up a flight of stairs. They passed through a pair of double doors to reveal the Hospital Wing.

To a student only familiar with the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts, Durmstrang’s wing seemed particularly odd. Gone were the sterile hospital smells, the comfortable sick beds and the bright light streaming through the windows. This Hospital Wing was just as dark as the rest of the school. Cots served as beds and the place looked as if it needed a good cleaning.

Christina noticed Tom’s surprise. “None of that nancy stuff you are used to here, boy. We expect our students to tough it out even if they are hurt or sick. You get healthy on your own time.”

Madam Raven sighed but refrained from commenting further. She gestured Tom to a hard looking chair near a cabinet. The librarian opened it to reveal a large number of potions. She selected two and handed them to Tom.

“Drink both of these and then we’ll take you on a tour of the school.” Tom looked at the two potions with a mistrustful look on his face. The librarian glared at him. “I will not repeat myself. They are simply healing draughts. Nothing that will harm you.

Tom grimaced mentally. Even if the potions would harm him he really had no choice but to drink them. If they were harmful and he didn’t drink, they could easily force the issue. After a moment longer of indecision, he drank the first and felt the cuts and bruises from his duel start to heal. Then he drank the second.

Tom expected the second potion to help further the healing. But what he felt was like a fog descending on his brain. He felt like he was floating above himself.

“Are you done yet?” Christina asked from her spot sitting on the end of a bed.

Her sister sighed, “Yes, we are done. Be careful with your wounds, Mr. Slytherin. The potion closed them and will speed the healing process but they can easily be reopened.” Turning to address her younger sister, Serena said, “Now we can go on your tour. Come along, boy”

Tom stood up and followed the pair of witches to start the tour. As they entered the hall, Christina wrapped her arm around Tom’s.

“I must say you fought much better than I expected coming from Hogwarts. You are a natural. You must be to have done so well with the poor training you’ve received. I duel all of the graduates into our Dark Army after they received the training my mentor and I designed.” The Dark Witch smiled, “I have to make sure the quality of the training is not diminishing.” Christina gave a little laugh. “I think you could have taken all but the best of those graduates. It really is remarkable for one just entering his sixth year.”

Through the effects of the second potion, Tom felt himself nod but he couldn’t say anything. It seemed his brain was running on two tracks. One part was listening to the Christina’s tour while another part observed from a distance. It was the distant part of his brain that wondered what the potion they gave him was doing to him. He wished he could ask his Mum. Tom was sure she would be able to identify the mixture.

The two Raven sisters led Tom through the school. The rough look of the entry hall continued throughout the school. The school had a dark, forbidding feeling. Tom felt like he was being watched constantly. No paintings lined the walls like a Hogwarts, just more of the representations of Dark creatures.

As Tom expected the Dark Arts classrooms were the best equipped in the school. Durmstrang had several rooms for the topic depending on the issue being discussed. One special room contained a large pit with permanent shields. When she noticed Tom’s quizzical expression, Serena informed him the room was for the study and observation of captured Dark creatures.

“At least twice a year we bring in werewolves to let the students watch their transformation and feeding. Many students come back even after they finish the class. It is a very popular study unit.” The librarian spoke in a very dry, academic tone. “Usually we drop a sheep in with the beast but sometimes our Lord acquires a Muggle undesirable from our Muggle ‘friends’. Some of them we use to study the lycanthrope infection pattern before we destroy them.”

Tom felt sick when he realized that behind the euphemism the stern librarian was telling him they were dropping Nazi concentration camp inmates into the pit with the werewolves. Then they used the survivors as study objects. Tom felt his stomach clench at the mental images of the unfortunates’ fates.

The tour continued through the Potions labs and then various classrooms for the ‘wand’ and theoretical subjects. One class was missing from the tour.

“Don’t you have Muggle studies?”

The librarian sniffed disdainfully. “Our students do not have time to waste on such a pointless topic. If a Pureblood family is made up of Muggle lovers and they want to teach their children about them, they can do it outside of school time. I believe some of the lesser schools that accept Muggleborns do waste their time on that subject.”

“From what I heard, your Dark Army seems to have no problems working in Muggle environments,” Tom commented.

Christina answered that one. “Part of their training is to act like a Muggle. They learn to use the proper terms and clothing. Lord Grindelwald tells us this is only until he achieves his final goal. Then the Muggles will not be a problem.”

Tom suspected there was another euphemism in that last sentence. He let the subject drop.

In a large cavern below the school, Tom was shown their Quidditch pitch and exercise grounds. Their Herbology greenhouses were also found in the underground area. Magical lights on the ceiling mimicked the sun.

“This was the creation of one of our early Headmasters. The lights exactly duplicate the current activity of the sun and gives off the same amount and types of light. The cavern also mimics the weather in Berlin or any other place we choose to set it to. Wind, rain, everything. It is quite marvelous.”

Tom openly agreed it was a brilliant piece of magic. ‘I wonder if I could duplicate this in the Chamber of Secrets?’ he wondered. ‘I’ll have to discuss it with Dad after I am free of this place.’

After spending time wandering the underground park and the greenhouses, Christina indicated it was time to move on. Tom didn’t want to go. He really wanted to get on a broom and get some flying time in. However the Dark Witch insisted.

The effects of the second potion seemed to be fading as they ascended from the cavern and walked the halls of the school. His ‘floating self’ seemed to be becoming a distant voice until it was finally gone. Tom felt relief that his head was finally clear again.

The final part of the tour impressed Tom against his will. The witches led him out a side door and onto the grounds surrounded by the huge, thick stone walls of the fortress. What he found there was stunning. The grounds looked like an ice garden. Beautiful statues made of carved ice decorated the grounds. They were too high for trees but magically created pines and evergreens added a bit of color to the area.

“Come,” Christina beckoned, “I want to show you something.”

Tom followed her up a staircase and onto a walkway along the top of the walls. From the walkway Tom could see over the wall to the whole panoramic he had only glimpsed from his small window.

The Alps spread out around him in a breathtaking sight. No other sign of human existence could be seen in any direction. The snow capped mountains with what looked like deep, thick forests in the valleys below captured Tom’s eyes and held them.

Christina noticed Tom looking at the forest below. “The forest below is much like your Forbidden Forest. We have several Giant tribes as

well as yeti, trolls, and others living in the valleys surrounding the school. We have a broom race through several of the valleys and back to the school.”

“The winner is the first one to make it back to the school?” Tom asked.

The Dark Witch shook her head with a grin. “It is pass-fail. If you make it through the course and back you pass. You can try it again if you fail but not many survive to make a second try.”

Tom was trying to decide if she was simply trying to scare him out of an escape attempt or if her happy expression was simply more evidence she was a complete bloody psychopath. He was leaning toward the latter when he felt a presence behind him.

“I had hoped to find you two together,” the Dark Lord said in a pleasant voice.

“My Lord, how may we serve you?” Christina asked.

“Oh, I am just here to give you both a spot of news.” Grindelwald replied. “Our operatives have finally been able to reach our former Hamburg safe house. It seems that after he sent you here, Fin released the demon slave I left in his care. Something caused the control wards to collapse. Fin and the slave were both lost.”

Christina looked concerned. “Did the Count survive?”

“It appears the slave and the Unspeakable eliminated each other. Our instruments indicated their fight is what caused the firestorm to occur. A badly burned body had the remains of a British Unspeakable cloak on it. The demon’s remains were only a hundred meters away.” Christina looked irate at the idea the Count died at another’s hand. The Dark Lord smiled at Tom. “I am sorry to say that your rescuer is no more.”

Tom turned back to look out across the wall. James was still alive. He was sure of that. The link through the scar would have reacted in some way if he were truly dead. James would be out there looking for him. And Tom would be ready.

A/N: I have had several people question me about the newly revealed back-story of Grindelwald and Dumbledore from DH and if I would be changing this story to match canon. This story has been AU since it started so I have no plans to adjust the earlier chapters. Too much work with no real benefit to the story. I was right about the two wizards knowing each other as young men and Grindelwald using Durmstrang as a base! (But even a broken clock is right twice a day. There are my two times...)

Several German readers have emailed over some of the translations used in the last few chapters. I apologize and will simply say my high school German was a looong time ago (and I sucked even then.) Actually thinking back Frau Whatsername kind of reminds me of Petunia. I will be correcting the errors you noted with your suggestions. Thanks!

Special thanks again to Dellacouer for her outstanding beta-ing!

Chapter 35 – Storm Hunters

15 August 1943 – Berlin

James moved purposefully down the street stepping carefully around the few rubble remains from Allied bombs. He was dressed in clothes “borrowed” from a businessman on a train shortly after leaving Hamburg. A quick charm changed his hair to grey and added what looked like burn scars on the side of his face and over his lightning scar. The papers from the former Dark Army member were long gone. A new forged set of papers with a picture matching his current description came out of a hidden pocket on his rucksack.

The new papers identified him as Albert Schweitz, a disabled veteran of the First World War. The scars were the results of a British chemical gas attack that left scars on his face and lungs leaving him with a raspy voice and low stamina. With all able-bodied men being drawn to the various fronts, an obviously injured veteran was the safest cover. Otherwise he would have to be constantly explaining why he was not in uniform to the frequent army and Gestapo checkpoints.

Berlin had changed a great deal since he was last visit here three years ago. Then it was a city preparing for war but it contained a mood of certain victory. The people were excited and positive of the glorious future of the ‘1,000 Year Reich’. Now, however, the city seemed to possess a miasma of concern bordering on fear. The invasion of Russia had been stopped and German forces were being forced back with horrible losses. Their strongest European partner, Italy, was being invaded and rumor said they were ready to surrender. The combined forces of Great Britain and the United States were preparing to invade France. The cost of war that seemed so distant to the Berliners three years ago seemed so much closer today.

James turned down a familiar street and stepped into a beer house. Three years ago the beer house had been a loud, boisterous place filled with excitement over the total victory against their historically rival nation of France. Now few patrons sat at the tables eating a quiet lunch. James, although he seemed oblivious, observed all of

this whilst making his way to the bar. He had to restrain a smile at seeing a familiar face.

The barman walked over to James and absently wiped some nonexistent dust off the bar. "Welcome to our establishment. We have a nice stew and my wife just finished cooking a nice Sauerbraten."

Dropping in seeming exhaustion onto a stool, James answered, "I'll take the stew please. And I would like a room for the next couple nights too. You do still have rooms to rent don't you? A traveler I met recommended your establishment."

Claude didn't even blink at the use of the code phrase. "That is nice to hear. We are fairly booked, but I am sure we can find room for a guest who was recommended to us. I will be right back with your stew."

James made a small show of removing his coat and settling into his seat. Claude's response told him the place was under a moderate level of surveillance. None of the beer house's dinners stood out as obvious agents but that was to be expected if they were any good. James snorted over the insanity of it all. A good agent looked completely innocent to pass on the street. So a room full of innocent people looked identical to a room full of good agents. Thinking too much about that could drive one insane.

Claude returned with a bowl of steaming stew. "Here is your stew. My wife will be down when you finish to take you to your room."

"Danke"

That was the second time Claude made a reference to his wife. He supposed Claude meant Maria. Maybe they needed to fake their marriage to help their cover.

James ate his stew and let his mind relax a bit. He tried to focus on what he would do after getting Tom back home. He had already decided to retire from the Unspeakables once Grindelwald was defeated. Two Dark Lords was more than enough for any Gryffindor. He didn't want to look greedy. Maybe once his magic was gone he

would attend Muggle medical school. It would be interesting to work with Sarah to integrate magical and Muggle healing practices. Putting people back together would be a lot more challenging than breaking them.

Finishing his stew, James looked up as Maria stepped into the room. He suppressed a smile of greeting at her beautiful face since he had to act the role of a stranger; a role that got even harder as he fought to keep the shock from showing on his face. Maria looked as cheerful and beautiful as he remembered from three years ago. It wasn't anything in *her* appearance that caused his shock.

The sleeping baby riding on her hip was another matter.

Maria came to a stop on the other side of the bar. "Hello, how was your stew? Are you ready to see your room?"

James gave her an easy smile that covered up the questions he wanted to ask. "Yes, the stew was excellent. I would like to see my room. It has been a difficult journey." Maria collected the empty bowl and motioned for James to follow her.

The pair walked silently up the stairs. She led James to the room that stood just opposite the door to what James remembered as Maria apartment. Maria expertly juggled the baby and the room key to allow James into the room. Once the door was shut, Maria dropped the act. She pressed up to James and hissed into his ear.

"What do you think you are doing here? We sent a signal three weeks ago we were under suspicion again. We were not to be contacted again until they went away!"

James was taken a bit by surprised at her vehemence but he could understand the source seeing the infant in her arms. "I've been out of contact with the home office. My trip was diverted."

That did not seem to appease Maria at all. "Well, you can't stay. Something happened that has them all stirred up. They are watching everywhere."

"Magically or physically?"

“Both,” she hissed in response.

Moving his hand in a subtle fashion, James erected a set of very light privacy wards. These wards did not really prevent anyone from listening in, instead they alerted the caster of every individual who could hear their words either physically or magically. Once he was satisfied, in a normal tone of voice James said, “We are safe to talk now.”

Maria’s eyes had gone wide watching James’s actions. “Alan?” James nodded with a slight smile. The witch wrapped an arm around James to give him a hug being careful not to wake the baby. “It is so good to see you! Only you would put up wards like that.”

“It is good to see you too. It has been awhile.” James gestured meaningfully to the infant in her arms. Now that he was close up to the infant, a suspicion dropped a lead weight into his stomach. He could not believe that Claude could do such a thing when he had a wife and child living in hiding in France.

Maria caught the unspoken question. A fire lit in her eyes. “Yes, he is Claude’s.” She settled onto the small couch. “Don’t judge him. It is not something either of us wanted to happen. The Dark Lord’s people became very suspicious of us about a year after you left. They were using Listening Charms and Muggle devices to monitor everything that happened in the building. Claude spotted a magic detection ward in time to prevent us from being caught.”

James settled into the chair next to her and indicated she should continue.

“You remember the cover I used before?” James nodded. During his last visit, Maria would drag different men up to her room. The men would leave in the morning with memories of a mind-blowing night after really having spent the night on the couch. “Once they started watching us I couldn’t do that anymore, but if I changed my habits too much they would be suspicious. I would not sleep with so many men so Claude ‘tamed’ me. We had to make it convincing. Little Alan here is the result.”

James looked surprised. “Alan?”

Maria smiled. "We did not know your real name and we could not very well call him by the other name we know you by."

"I'm honored that you would name him after me. Is it safe for you to stay here? Couldn't we get you out to England?"

Maria shrugged as she patted the baby who was making the soft grumbles of a waking child. "It is no more dangerous to stay then it would be to try to cross the lines. We have taken precautions to ensure Alan's safety if anything were to happen to us."

A thousand questions ran through James's head. He wanted to ask what they planned to do after the war. What about Claude's real wife? But he held his mouth shut. It was not really any of his business. Who could say how the war could turn out? Even if the Muggle war remained unchanged by his activities, James knew he had already impacted the magical war with Grindelwald in a major way.

Instead, James asked, "How serious is the observation on you right now?"

"It is more an occasional check. They seem to look in on us at least once a week. The last time was four days ago so we are due for another soon. That is why I was so upset."

James nodded his understanding. "I will leave in the morning. I will need to send a message to the home office. Then we will need to find a safe house."

Gone was the worried mother as Maria switched into an experienced operative's mode of thinking. "How long will you need it for and for how many people?"

"It will have to be in southern Germany. Somewhere I can hide ten to twelve people. Also I need to talk with your sister."

Maria frowned at the last statement. "It is very dangerous to contact her. She lives in the very belly of the beast. I am not really sure whose side she is on. I think she only really cares about her books."

“I have to take that risk. She is the only good source we have in Durmstrang,” James replied.

“You’re going to hit the citadel,” Maria breathed out in barely a whisper.

James nodded. “If I have too.”

“That is insane! The Dark Lord keeps his best fighters there. His Inner Circle and his Ritual Master live in that place. His demons infest the area. You’ll never get close to it! What would be so important that you would risk this?”

James looked down at the floor. In a quiet but firm voice he answered, “They took my son. I’m just going to get him back.” Maria looked stricken as she automatically clutched her son a bit tighter.

They sat in silence for a few more minutes. Then Maria rose from her place. “Compose your message. I will get it sent immediately. I will have Claude start the process of procuring the safe house. You rest for a bit. I will send Claude up in awhile. I am sure you two have a lot to talk about.

“Thank you, Maria,” James said as she walked out of the room.

31 August 1943 – Berlin

The wail of the air raid siren pierced the quiet of the late summer German night. It was a sound the people of the city had unfortunately become all too accustomed to hearing. Soon the repeating cracks of the anti-aircraft guns added their voices to the hideous noise of war.

The clear skies allowed the Allied bombardiers to accurately aim their bombs on the targets, transportation centers such as airports and rail yards. However the clear night also worked in favor of the city’s defenders. The flak from their guns buffeted the bombers and more than one aircraft fell from the sky with crews desperately trying to bail out.

One 2,000 pound bomb did fall wildly out of the Allied target area. The explosive device landed on a small beer house and inn not far

from the main cluster of government buildings in the German capital. The Gestapo and their magical colleagues investigated to see if a bomb really was the cause of the damage. The building was the suspected haven for anti-government malcontents. However, analysis of the bomb damage and recovered bomb case fragments verified the cause of the explosion. The charred remains of four men, a woman, and an infant child were found in the rubble. The investigators cheerfully closed the case and toasted the ironic deaths of the state's internal enemies at the hands of their external enemies.

No notice was taken of two men, a woman and a child leaving the city in a small lorry. None of them had been within ten miles of the beer house when it was destroyed. A small charmed vase released a Summoning Charm when activated by the sound of the air raid siren. The charm pulled the bomb off target to land directly on top of it. The explosion almost vaporized the vase, leaving no magical trace of the spell to be detected.

3 November 1943 – Bad Wurzach, Germany

The arrival of the refugees attracted little attention in the small community of Bad Wurzach. The small town was known only for its therapeutic mud baths and contained nothing of strategic importance to either side of the magical or Muggle wars. It also had no Pureblood wizard families to notice any magic in use.

Maria convinced Claude and James to locate the safe house in the town.

Maria explained it to them. "I grew up in Ravensburg. An ancestor helped found the town. He didn't like owls and tried to raise ravens instead. It is only 25 km away. My parents still live there so if we need to talk to Serena it is best if she has the simple excuse of visiting family. That is why I had you meet her there, James."

The couple rented a small farm with no comment from the locals. The wife spoke with the remains of the local accent while her husband spoke with the Berlin accent. Their large dog elicited much more comment as it was obviously part wolf. However, its cheerful disposition and well disciplined manner soon removed those fears.

Their neighbors looked on with approval as the new tenants displayed good German industriousness in putting their new farm to rights. The old barn was cleaned up and fixed with an almost magical speed. The wolf-like dog soon earned a reputation for being a first class herding dog with their small flock of sheep.

Two months after their arrival, the small family received four cloaked visitors late in the night. They appeared at the edge of the small forest that bordered the farm. They paused as they looked about for any sign of watchers. A thick blanket of clouds blocked most of the light from the moon and stars. Wartime regulations prohibited the use of street lights or other outside lights lest Allied bombers use them as navigation to their targets.

A low growl alerted the four to the wolf's presence behind them. One of the figures urgently whispered, "Count, it is us!"

James-the-wolf knew exactly who he had approached. His sense of smell identified the four figures well before he revealed himself. He was not happy with who the Ministry sent him as a team. But this was not the place to have that discussion.

The wolf stepped out of the bush and into the recently tilled field. He trotted a few steps towards the farm house and then turned to look back at the cluster of figures. The expression he gave them clearly said, "Are you coming or not?"

The four cloaked figures followed the wolf into the barn. James resumed his human form as the trailing figure closed the barn door.

"Cloaks?" James asked in a scornful voice. "Can you dress any more obviously that you don't belong here? Muggles have not worn cloaks like that in almost a century!"

The Unspeakable known as Charlie was the first to lower her hood. Her expression was slightly embarrassed. "We thought the cloaks would be helpful in breaking up our forms if we needed to hide in the forest on our way here. We never wore them in towns or anything!"

James ignored her defense as he rounded on two of the other forms. "And what in the name of Merlin are you two doing here?"

“It was the only thing I could do to keep your wife and my wife from coming here themselves!” one of the figures defended. “I had to use the safety of your other four children as hostages to allow me to come instead!”

James scowled and turned to his companion. “And what is your excuse?”

“I was bored,” came the languid reply. “I needed to get out of the house for a spot of fun. Besides Uncle Thomas is too old to be let out without a minder.” The last comment cracked James’s angry scowl with a small smile. It also received a small growl from Thomas.

“This is so touching. I think I’ll spew.”

James turned to the speaker, the still cloaked final figure. “Why the hell did they send you, Malfoy?”

Abraxus Malfoy removed his hood and sneered at James. The twenty-five year old wizard looked so much like Lucius and Draco that James had to restrain himself from hexing him on sight. “The Minister felt my presence here would be important.”

“What maggoty brained idea gave him that impression?”

“Unlike the rest of you, I have been to Durmstrang before. I visited as part of an exchange program during my Sixth year.” Malfoy sneered, “If I had known it was to rescue your son I would never have come.”

James started to reply when Thomas placed a hand on his shoulder. His grandfather whispered into his ear. “He had to make a magically binding oath before he was permitted to come that he would not reveal any information learned on this mission without your specific permission. He only knows you as the Count and doesn’t know about Tom’s heritage.” In a louder voice, he said, “Albus will join us for the retrieval when we are ready.”

Chaz Potter leaned against a post and commented, “You have not changed since you were a First year, Malfoy. I was a Seventh year prefect and you were still an arrogant little shite who thought you were superior to the rest of us.”

"Is there a better place to discuss all this?" Charlie asked. The witch gestured indicating the exposed position of the barn.

James acknowledged her point. He approached each of the visitors and handed them a small piece of paper one at a time. The note read, "Under the crap, sanctuary can be found."

A trap door appeared in the floor of the barn. James opened it up and led the way down into the ground. Twenty feet below the barn the downward passage opened into a wood paneled room lit with magical lamps. Two doors led out of the room. A large map of the Alps dominated one wall of the room. Several magical flags fluttered on the map indicating points of interest. One was labeled Durmstrang and the other said Ravensburg. Two sets of bunk beds sat against the opposite wall.

"The door on the left is for the loo," James said he entered the room. "Charlie, the other door is for a bedroom. You can share it with Maria and her babe."

Charlie looked stunned. "She brought an infant on the mission?"

"She didn't have the child when the mission began," James shrugged. "She has been our main conduit into the German magical resistance. When we leave she comes with us. Things are going to be too hot for her to stay here." Using as few words as possible, James explained the circumstances of young Alan's birth.

"Have you been able to reconnaissance the area of the school?" Charlie asked.

James walked up to the map and said, "Durmstrang"

The map zoomed into the area immediately surrounding the magical flag. The area surrounding the school was marked as was the outside walls of the school. No detail of the area inside the walls was shown.

"I have traveled all around the base of the mountain the school sits on. Anyone uninvited sees a normal mountain. The school's builders magically removed the top part of the mountain to create the flat area needed to build the school."

“So you can lead us to the mountain even if we can’t see the school?” Charlie asked.

“That is the least of our problems,” James answered. “The valleys surrounding the school make the Forbidden Forest at Hogwarts look like a kiddies’ play park. I’ve run into giants, trolls, manticores, harpies, and dire wolves. The wolves won’t be a problem but I also saw signs of yeti and mountain dwarves as well.” His four listeners all went a bit pale at his news.

“We do have an inside contact on staff at the school. Maria has started communications to have the contact meet us. Our contact can officially invite you to visit the school negating the main wards. We also hope the contact can take a device of mine that will send the layout of the school back to the map here.”

Charlie ignored the magic of the map. She assumed it was a Department of Mysteries invention. “Have you found a way into the school?”

“No, there are no paths up the mountain to the school’s plateau. Even the naturally occurring ones have been magically removed or blocked. Only an expert team of climbers could make that ascent. But I don’t think they could do it without attracting attention.”

Thomas also ignored the map’s magic. He had seen it before in James’s Hogwart’s office. “What about brooms? Can we fly in?”

James nodded. “That is one possibility. I’ve seen students out occasionally flying well above the valley and inside the boundary of the school’s wards. The harpies roost on the mountains surrounding the school. They often fly just outside the ward looking for a student to accidentally fly too far. I saw them catch a Third year girl and drag her down.” James frowned. “No one from the school made any effort to save her.”

Thomas looked sick. “What happened to her?”

“They mauled her rather badly. I was running with the dire wolf pack when the incident occurred. The dire wolves distracted the harpies while I got her back on her broom.”

“You must have been a Gryffindor. No wonder Potter adopted you.” Malfoy sneered. “You risk your own mission to save an inconsequential girl.”

“She wasn’t inconsequential to her family, Malfoy. You forget that Durmstrang only accepts students from magical families, half-bloods or ‘better’. So, shouldn’t you be arguing for saving her? After all, you know she wasn’t a Mudblood.”

Malfoy turned red at James’s comment but held back his retort at an angry gesture from Chaz Potter. “Do you think she put the mission at risk?” he asked.

“No,” James answered shaking his head. “By my brief check, she had several major lacerations across her face, chest and arms. She also had signs of a minor concussion. Even if she remembers anything she it will be fragments and unclear. She was almost unconscious when I launched her broom up.”

“Any ideas, Count?” Charlie asked.

James turned to Malfoy and asked, “When you visited the school did you go down to the cavern to play quidditch?”

“Yes, I played as Chaser for one of their teams for the year,” he answered with a sneer.

James smiled. He had been concerned the caverns had not yet been built. “When I visited the school my escort was a Quidditch player also. He was quite proud of their pitch and the whole cavern. My friend was something of an amateur geologist.” Seeing the look of confusion on the four Purebloods, James explained, “A geologist is a Muggle that studies rocks, mountains and the Earth itself. Victor told me the cavern was a magical expansion of a naturally occurring cave system. He spoke of a tunnel system that had been blocked off to prevent any creatures from entering the cavern. He was upset because he wanted to explore them.”

“You think these tunnels exist?” Charlie asked.

"I found a crevasse about a third of the way up the mountain," James replied. "At the bottom was a cave entrance. It led to a network of tunnels. I didn't get to explore it much but I think they could be the tunnels my friend told me about."

"You want us to go crawling around in caves?" Malfoy asked in a disgusted tone.

James gritted his teeth in frustration. Why had the Minister sent this git? "I thought you were a Slytherin, Malfoy. I'd have thought you liked being underground. Now shut up and listen. I will do the exploring. Let's just say I am uniquely suited to it." Thomas and Charlie nodded their agreement.

"You want us to work on the wards and getting into the cavern?" Charlie guessed.

"Right in one," James confirmed. "We also need to get past anything living in those caves. I think the mountain dwarves at least visit them occasionally."

"I might be able to contact some goblin miners," Chaz offered. "They are rogues thrown out of their clans for various offences to goblin law. Their only loyalty is to themselves and whoever is currently paying them but once they accept your money they keep your secrets." He shrugged, "Not out of honor, but because it is good business sense in the long term."

James smiled at his cousin. It was nice to have a cousin who was intelligent, competent and not a fat tub of lard; one he could count on. Dudley may have improved after the Dementor incident but Harry could never have used any of those words to describe his cousin. Technically, Chaz was his father's cousin, but James was more than happy to accept Chaz as family.

"Look into that," James directed. "If nothing else and we have to dig through I am sure they have the tools and experience to do that."

Charlie gestured to a clock on the wall. "Why don't we get some rest? We can review all of our options after a good night's sleep. I want to plan a reconnaissance of the area myself. I trust the map but I want

to see the terrain myself.” With mutters of agreement, the team agreed to finish their discussions in the morning.

5 December 1943 – Alps

Winter comes early in the German Alps. The tall mountain range had year-round snow on the tallest peaks. By October, snow was already starting to blanket the lower sections of the mountains. Well before December the mountain valleys were filled with snow.

On a mountain peak across the valley from the school was a small outpost in the desolate area. Made entirely of snow, the only charms on the snow hut kept it from being magically located. The only source of warmth within the hut was the occupants’ own clothes and the warming charms placed on them.

The hut provided clear visibility of the front of the school including the Apparition point just outside the wards. A Muggle telescope was used to keep watch on the school. Charms on it permitted it to work in low light situations as well as the nonvisible light spectrums. Another charm placed a recording from the telescope into a Penseive vial. The vial could then be taken to be viewed in a Penseive at a later time. Three more unmanned telescopes focused on the school surrounded the school. Their vials had to be collected every couple of days for review back at the farm.

Early on they found out that while noninvited wizards could not find the school, once they were led there, they could in fact see it. They then needed to be guided away from the school after their observation shift was completed. Once they left the memory of where the school was located was magically erased.

“This is such a waste of my time! Sitting here watching for a young idiot too careless to prevent his own kidnapping.”

A month of listening to Malfoy’s complaints had made the rest of the team almost deaf to the sound of his voice.

Claude never looked up from the telescope. Christina and the large female witch who looked like a troll (James had dubbed her Millicent.)

had Apparated out an hour ago. Keeping track of the whereabouts of the Dark Witch was of vital importance.

Malfoy continued his complaints feeling slighted by the French Auror's lack of response. A small sound outside the snow hut was all the warning they received before the Count appeared in the doorway.

"Malfoy, you don't even have your wand in hand," James growled. "If you are going to be a pain in the arse, at least be a competent pain in the arse!" Malfoy started to protest only to stop when he noticed the look in the team leader's eyes. "Go back to the farm, Malfoy. The fence on the goat pen needs to be fixed. Go fix it. Do not use magic! I will check. Now go."

After Malfoy left, James settled into his vacated spot. However he had his wand sitting in his hand whilst facing the door.

Without looking up from his observations, Claude commented in a dry tone, "As a good Frenchman, it displeases me to see my fellow countrymen emigrate to other lands. However, I do not regret the Malfoy family leaving France for England."

"Are you sure?" James asked in a matching tone. "I am more than willing to ship them back to you."

"No, my friend. He and his family are all yours now. My poor France will have enough to deal with once we get the forces of Darkness out of our lands. Too many of my people, magical and Muggle, have been willing to serve the Hun."

James remembered how much of the wizarding world acted after Voldemort's coup toppled the Ministry. Dumbledore's death broke their will to fight and most just wanted to survive.

Aloud James said, "I am sure most did just what they need for they and their families to survive these times. I doubt most truly supported their invaders."

"Perhaps," Claude allowed, "perhaps"

“Alan is growing so fast. Hard to believe he is almost a year old already.”

Claude sighed and glanced up for the first time. “Yes, he is.”

“Have you given any thought to what you will do after the war?” James asked.

Claude gave a Gaelic shrug. “I will return to France and my wife. I will tell her everything and hope I live for her to forgive me. Veela are very beautiful and also have very, very bad tempers.” The French Auror chuckled softly, “Oddly enough, they are even more beautiful in the midst of their tempers. At least, until they turn into birds and start throwing fire.”

Remembering Fleur and Gabrielle’s tempers, James could only silently agree. James smiled sadly as he remembered an incident at Bill and Fleur’s wedding. Ron made a typical Ron comment about the couple’s wedding night. Gabrielle overheard and tore into the youngest Weasley male. The fact Hermione and Ginny stood glaring at him from behind her whilst Harry and the Twins laughed made the scene even funnier. Unfortunately, it was the last time all of them would ever all be together. Gabrielle died with her parents returning to France in a Death Eater ambush.

James set that thinking aside and returned to the issue at hand. “What about Maria and Alan?”

“I regret the circumstances that led to Alan but I do not regret the birth of my son.” Claude sighed. “However, I do not think my wife will allow him to live in our house. She may understand the circumstances and forgive me, but I do not believe she will do that if she must live with the results of those circumstances in her presence every day.” In an afterthought, he added, “Or has Maria living nearby.”

ADAD

Several days later, James moved between the snowdrifts in his wolf form. The snow was not too deep at this altitude but the drifts were more than high enough to hide a wolf. James was enjoying the fact his animagus form had its winter coat come in and it not only kept him

very warm but it was also very good camouflage in low light against the snow. A storm had come through earlier and now the winds had died down to a bare stirring. A human would find the weather cold, but the wolf found it to be a pleasant evening. The observation hut was not too far away, just over the next rise.

The wolf came around the side of the rise. His wolf's instinct told him walking directly over the rise where he would be silhouetted against the sky was never a good idea. As he came around the rise, the wind brought him a strange scent. It was a human but not one he knew.

His senses on full alert, the wolf moved purposefully towards the source of the scent. Then he caught a whiff of a scent he knew. It was Malfoy. Wolves can't swear too well, but their growling can take on a lot of meanings.

James found them twenty meters outside the snow hut. Malfoy was on his knees with a wand pointed at the back of his head. A pair of wizards in the winter cloaks of the Durmstrang staff stood behind him. The wolf dropped to its belly to crawl closer to the three wizards.

"I will ask you one last time. What are you doing here?"

"I was sent to watch the comings and goings at the school. I think we are going to try to kill the Dark Lord! Please, I don't know any more!" Malfoy babbled in fear of his life.

James tuned out the rest of what Malfoy was saying. It didn't really matter now what he told them. Neither Durmstrang wizard would be leaving this place.

The wizard holding his wand to Malfoy's head was apparently tiring of his babbling for his life. James saw him tighten his grip and alter his stance slightly as he prepared to curse Malfoy. As much as he was tempted, James could not allow that to happen.

The wolf appeared out of nowhere. No growl announced his approach. Following his canine instincts, the wolf attacked the wizard holding Malfoy first. Like the werewolf before, James ripped the wizard's hamstring tearing it to shreds. Before the wizard even hit the

ground, James the wolf had his teeth in the throat of the second wizard.

James released the dying wizard and returned his attention to the one he had hamstringed. The wizard had dropped his wand to grasp his injured leg. James transformed and picked up the man's wand.

Malfoy finally realized he was no longer a prisoner. He looked around to find one of his captors dead and the other rolling on the ground in pain. His savior was the hated Count. Then Malfoy noticed the blood around the Count's mouth.

James watched as Malfoy paled at his appearance and then fainted. 'He's as cowardly as his grandson will be,' he laughed in his head. He turned his attention back to the injured wizard. A muttered spell numbed the pain the wizard felt.

"How did you find us?"

The wizard panted for a moment longer as the memory of the pain faded. "What does it matter? You are going to kill me anyway."

James nodded. "Unfortunately that is true. I cannot have you reporting back in and I have no safe place to keep you. I am far from any safe base. However, I can allow you to choose the manner of your passing."

Ten minutes later, James carried the unconscious body of Malfoy into the snow hut. Thomas was on duty watching when the pair entered the room. James was explaining what happened as Malfoy awoke. James had cleaned up so the Pureblood wizard did not faint again.

"What happened? How did they find you?"

"I don't know," Malfoy asserted. "I just went for a bloody walk. They swooped in on brooms?"

"Did you cast any spells out of the hut?" Thomas asked.

"I didn't cast any spells on me!" Then he paused a moment. "I mean it was only a Warming Charm..."

Thomas's face went red. "You stupid prat. You could have cost us this whole mission!"

James interrupted. "Enough, Thomas. I am sure Mr. Malfoy has learnt his lesson." Malfoy nodded sullenly.

Thomas subsided and turned back to the telescope. After five minutes of silence, Thomas asked, "Do you know what this means, Malfoy?"

Malfoy's composure had (unfortunately) returned in the last five minutes. "No, what?" he sneered.

"Since he saved you from your own stupidity, you owe the Count a Life Debt now."

Malfoy froze in shock as his own magic kept him from denying it.

24 February 1944 – At the foot of the Alps

Chaz Potter led the six goblins into an abandoned looking woodcutter's shack deep in the forest. Muggle-repealing charms and Notice-me-not charms helped foster the illusion. They entered to find James wearing his Unspeakable robes waiting for them. A couple goblin-sized bunks and a table were the only other things in the room.

Chaz gestured towards the Count. "Rockjaw of the Stonesplitters, may I introduce you to the Count.?"

The led goblin grunted. "I've heard of you, Count. You've left an impressive body count behind you. No doubt how you received your name."

"I do not count the number of people I have been forced to kill." James noticed the goblin's eye light for a moment. "No, I don't use pretty words to cover up what I mean. I have had to kill people who sought to hurt me and mine. But I have never hurt anyone who did not act against me first."

The goblin grunted in approval. "Good. War is good for gold but bad for living. The dead cannot spend their gold." The other goblins in his crew grunted their agreement.

James looked shocked at the goblin's pronouncement. He slept through most of Binn's classes but he was awake enough (thanks mostly to Hermione's elbows) to know that the goblin race saw acquiring wealth to be the ultimate goal. Selling weapons and supplies to both sides in a war was seen as a tried and true means of gathering wealth quickly.

Chaz noted James's surprise. "I mentioned that Rockjaw and his companions fell afoul of goblin law. They refused to sell goblin arms to a Dark Lord in Africa fifteen years ago. The Goblin Elders took this poorly. They were exiled from their tribes. However, they also do excellent work and have been hired by Gringotts on several occasions as consultants."

The goblins gave a harsh laugh at Chaz's explanation. When Rockjaw noticed the two humans looking confused, he said, "My uncle Reithfourl is Goblin Elder. He agrees with me the goblin race must change but not so quickly. He also wants me where he can keep an eye on me. Doesn't want Rockjaw off starting trouble by talking too much. That is why Gringotts keeps hiring us." The other goblins laughed harder.

"Now, what do you want from Stonesplitters?"

James spread a map out on the table. "We need the Stonesplitters to help us breach the wards on Durmstrang. This cave system leads up to a cavern directly under the school. They sealed all the openings between the cavern and the cave system and magically hardened the stone they placed there. They did not however seal the natural rock. The thinnest point is fifty meters. We need you to clear our path into that cavern. Mr. Potter assures me you and your goblins can do this."

"Why do you want to bring your war into a school with human young ones?"

James knew this was an important question to the goblin. Fortunately, he had a simple answer to the question. "We seek to recover a

human young one stolen from us. He is my son and I will have him home again.

Rockjaw grunted, "Good answer. We will pierce the wards for you."

James smiled in relief. "Thank you."

12 March 1944 - Ravensburg

It had taken four and a half very frustrating months for Maria to be able to set up a meeting with her librarian sister. Occasional letters passed back and forth but no real information had come from those letters. Simply the fact Tom was alive and still within the walls of the school.

James already knew this. He had spent many nights sleeping in the area of the school. From that distance his scar reacted easily to Tom's emotions. The scar delivered bouts of pain on an almost regular basis. At least three times a day, usually around meal times, his head throbbed. Not nearly as bad as during the bad, old days of Voldemort, but it was disturbingly high to be feeling from his Tom. Tom was keeping his Occlumency shields up preventing James from talking to his son via the link.

'He has to know I am here, why won't he let me in?' James wondered.

The sound of someone approaching ended James's musings. Once again he was to meet Serena Raven in the old library. Maria sat openly at a table whilst James lurked behind the stacks.

The severe looking witch approached the slightly younger witch sitting at the table. "Sister."

Maria smiled easily. "Hello, Serena. It is good to see you again after all these years."

The Durmstrang librarian ignored the greeting. "It is too dangerous for us to be meeting like this. Why did you force me to come?"

Maria looked slightly disappointed. "No greetings after over twelve years, Serena? How did we all end up so different? You only care

about books, Christina is a psychopath who only wants to fight, and me with my causes. I wonder how we can even be related sometimes.”

The severe witch settled into the chair across from her sister. “You improperly label Christina. She enjoys fighting and wishes to be the best, but she is not a mentally unbalanced. I admit her methods are sometimes overenthusiastic and flamboyant but she seems to only fixate on those she considers superior magical fighters. My hypothesis is it is the challenge and competition she desires, not random violence. Serving the Dark Lord provides her with more than sufficient opportunities to test her skills. Her drive is somewhat like you enjoy the challenge of fighting for seemingly hopeless causes, sister. Although this time I believe you chose the correct position.”

Maria smiled at her sister’s comments. “I missed you, Serena. I want to show you something.” She slid a paper across the table.

Serena picked it up. It was a wizarding photo. “Who is this?”

“Your nephew Alan. He turned one in January.”

Serena set the photo back down on the table. “He is healthy?” Maria nodded. “Good. Now why am I here?”

James stepped out from the stacks. “I need information and your assistance.”

Serena did not look surprised at the appearance of the cloaked Unspeakable. She recognized his sigil from their previous meeting. “You are supposed to be dead.”

James smiled in his hood. “I am sure that upset your sister.”

A slight frown crossed the librarian’s features. “She sulked for a week. Now what do you want?”

“How is Tom Evans?”

“He is known as Tom Slytherin to the students. He attends the standard classes with the students although he receives special instruction from both the Dark Lord and Christina.

The Count leaned in across the table. “What kind of special instruction is he receiving?”

A small amount of fear crossed Serena’s eyes. “Christina is teaching dueling using Dark spells. I don’t know what the Dark Lord is teaching?”

“Tom is using Dark magic?” he growled. Serena nodded. “We need to get him out of there quickly.”

The Count placed a small bag on the table in front of Serena. She glanced into the bag and saw a number of Muggle marbles. “What should I do with these?”

“Drop one in every room in the school. Then walk away. You don’t need to do anything else.”

Serena raised an eyebrow. “And no one will notice the school is suddenly filled with Muggle balls?”

“The marbles will dissolve ten seconds after leaving the bag. Put one in every room or open area no matter how large or small it is. I solemnly swear it will not harm the school or students.”

The librarian nodded her acceptance. “Very well. Is there anything else?”

Maria nodded and slid several pieces of parchment and a quill across the table. “We need you to write out several invitations so we can bypass the main school wards.” Serena calmly pulled the parchment to her and quickly made out the invitations.

“I have done all you have asked. I must return to the school soon.” She started to get up.

James had opened a light Legilamency probe when the witch first arrived. She had strong natural shields. Any attempt to breach them

would have immediately alerted her. James knew he would have succeeded in gaining access to her mind but it would have been a blatant frontal assault. However, the feather light probe was enough to pick up very strong emotions or thoughts.

“What are you scared of me learning?”

Serena dropped back into her seat. Fear was now openly visible on her face.

ADAD

Two hours after dark, James and Maria returned to the farm. James made directly for the team’s underground quarters. All conversation in the hidden room stopped as he walked in.

James pointed at his grandfather. “Contact the Ministry. I want Dumbledore yesterday. We are going to finish this and get my son back now.”

1944

January

6 - Soviet troops advance into Poland

17 - First attack toward Cassino, Italy.

22 - Allies land at Anzio.

27- Leningrad relieved after a 900-day siege.

February

15-18 - Allies bomb the monastery at Monte Cassino.

16 - Germans counter-attack against the Anzio beachhead.

March

4 - Soviet troops begin an offensive on the Belorussian front; First major daylight bombing raid on Berlin by the Allies.

15 - Second Allied attempt to capture Monte Cassino begins.

18 - British drop 3000 tons of bombs during an air raid on Hamburg, Germany.

April

8 - Soviet troops begin an offensive to liberate Crimea.

9 - Soviet troops recapture Sevastopol.

11 - Allies attack the Gustav Line south of Rome.

12 - Germans surrender in the Crimea.

15 - Germans withdraw to the Adolf Hitler Line.

May

25 - Germans retreat from Anzio.

June

5 - Allies enter Rome.

6 - D-Day landings.

9 - Soviet offensive against the Finnish front begins.

10 - Nazis liquidate the town of Oradour-sur-Glane in France.

13 - First German V-1 rocket attack on Britain.

22 - Operation Bagration begins (the Soviet summer offensive).

27 - U.S. troops liberate Cherbourg.

July

3 - 'Battle of the Hedgerows' in Normandy; Soviets capture Minsk.

9 - British and Canadian troops capture Caen.

18, 1944 - U.S. troops reach St. Lô.

20 - German assassination attempt on Hitler fails.

24 - Soviet troops liberate first concentration camp at Majdanek.

25-30 - Operation Cobra (U.S. troops break out west of St. Lô).

28 - Soviet troops take Brest-Litovsk. U.S. troops take Coutances.

August

1 - Polish Home Army uprising against Nazis in Warsaw begins; U.S. troops reach Avranches.

4 - Anne Frank and family arrested by the Gestapo in Amsterdam, Holland.

7 - Germans begin a major counter-attack toward Avranches.

15 - Operation Dragoon begins (the Allied invasion of Southern France).

19 - Resistance uprising in Paris.

19/20 - Soviet offensive in the Balkans begins with an attack on Romania.

20 - Allies encircle Germans in the Falaise Pocket.

25 - Liberation of Paris.

29 - Slovak uprising begins.

31 - Soviet troops take Bucharest.

September

1-4 - Verdun, Dieppe, Artois, Rouen, Abbeville, Antwerp and Brussels liberated by Allies.

4 - Finland and the Soviet Union agree to a cease-fire.

13 - U.S. troops reach the Siegfried Line.

17 - Operation Market Garden begins (Allied airborne assault on Holland).

26 - Soviet troops occupy Estonia.

October

2 - Warsaw Uprising ends as the Polish Home Army surrenders to the Germans.

10-29 - Soviet troops capture Riga.

14 - Allies liberate Athens; Rommel commits suicide.

21 - Massive German surrender at Aachen.

30 - Last use of gas chambers at Auschwitz.

November

20 - French troops drive through the 'Belfort Gap' to reach the Rhine.

24 - French capture Strasbourg.

December

4 - Civil War in Greece; Athens placed under martial law.

16-27 - Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes.

17 - Waffen SS murder 81 U.S. POWs at Malmedy.

26 - Patton relieves Bastogne.

27 - Soviet troops besiege Budapest.

Chapter 36 – Storm Surge

1 September 1943 – Durmstrang

The young wizard sat at his desk reviewing one of the texts his teacher assigned him to read as homework. It was fascinating material. So much magic was left forgotten, abandoned due to the squeamishness of a few, weak wizards in anonymous government bureaucracy positions. Why should a powerful wizard listen to these small-minded, almost squibs?

The Flesh Dissolving Curse really was an incredible feat of magic. The magic acted like a swarm of insects taking thousands of tiny bites out of the target. The flesh was then converted into the separate molecules. Water was released into the atmosphere as steam. If the spell hit the target in the foot, the entire body would be consumed within ten minutes without the proper counter-curse. Of course, death occurred well before that point. An 80 kilogram (176 lb) wizard hit by this spell would leave behind a 32 kilogram pile of nutrient and trace element-rich dust.

Oddly enough, the spell was developed during the Black Death as a way of disposing of the numerous bodies left behind by the plague. It allowed the magical community to dispose of the bodies safely without any risk of the bodies spreading more disease. The fact the remaining dust made excellent fertilizer was an added bonus. However, after the plague subsided the magical governments listed this spell as 'Dark' because the dust remains were easily disposed of making murder cover-ups much easier.

Tom frowned at the stupidity of the wizarding world and concentrated on the pronunciation and wand movements required for casting the spell. It was not a quick spell to cast but did not require much more power than a good *Reducto*.

The sound of the door opening brought the young wizard's attention back to his surroundings. He looked up to see a very large witch filling his doorway. He smiled to see his favorite teacher.

"Good morning, Professor Helena. Have the other students arrived yet?"

The half-troll witch gave him a leering smile that would have terrified anyone that did not know her. She actually had a rather pleasant disposition on top of a wicked sense of humor. At least if you didn't annoy her.

"I just heard they have left Berlin and are on their way here. They should arrive in the cavern in two hours."

Rather than use a train like Hogwarts, Durmstrang used a black ship that navigated subterranean rivers making stops in central locations in eastern and central Europe. Berlin was the last stop before making for the school. The ship arrived in the lake inside the cavern. The students would then proceed to their Great Hall for their Opening Feast. Durmstrang did not have Houses like Hogwarts. Their dorms were divided by class year and sex. Unofficially, they were also divided by nation of origin. Each dorm room housed four students and the students could choose their own dorm mates. It was not the school's concern if the rooms tended to cluster along nationalistic lines.

The half-troll professor walked casually into the room and settled on the end of the bed. The bed groaned in protest but held her weight. "Are you looking forward to meeting your new classmates, Mr. Slytherin?"

Tom nodded. "After spending over three months as a captive, it will be nice to see people my own age again."

"Ah, Tom," the professor said with a (for her) gentle smile, "you are not a captive anymore. You are our Lord's own apprentice. And when you are truly ready, you will leave this school to face our enemies and defeat them. You have already progressed a great deal."

Tom gave her a grateful smile. He never revealed the full extent of his training under James. Christina pushed him in dueling to near his limits, but his Occlumency and Animagus skills remained known only to himself. His studies here may have revealed James Evans's hypocrisy, but that did not mean the wizard's training had been wrong. In fact, he found the man he once deluded himself into calling 'Father' had provided him with training much greater than had been admitted

at the time. James placed a higher emphasis on surviving and winning a duel then following the rules.

A house-elf appeared in the room with a lunch tray. "Lunch for Master Slytherin!" the elf proclaimed in an excited voice.

"Set it on the table," Tom directed with a gesture at the table. He turned to his professor. "Would you care to join me for lunch?" he asked politely.

"No, I have already eaten," the witch replied. "I will leave you to your lunch. A professor will come up to take you to the Great Hall for the Feast."

"Will I be moving into the dorms with the other students?" Tom asked.

Professor Helena frowned, "You are not a regular student, Mr. Slytherin. You are our Lord's apprentice. As such this is your rightful place, not in the dorms."

Tom sighed. He had heard this argument several times already in the last week.

Professor Helena caught his sigh and started to get angry. "You may visit the dorms, the classrooms, or anywhere else in the school until curfew. But your Master insists you stay in this room and you will not question it!"

There was nothing Tom could do but acquiesce. "Yes, professor." Helena nodded before turning and leaving the room. Tom picked his book back up and moved over to the table with his lunch. He settled down to finish the chapter whilst absently eating his lunch.

ADAD

Tom was surprised when Christina arrived to take him to the Feast. His surprise must have shown.

"Our Lord wanted to ensure you were able to attend the Feast without any problems."

Tom followed the Dark Witch down to the Great Hall. He idly played with the wand sheathed on his forearm. A month ago he would have hexed her as soon as his wand was back in his possession. Even two weeks ago, but now something made him hold back.

The witch confused Tom. One minute she was a pleasant person, but put her in a dueling situation and she became a crazed killer. Even talking about magical combat caused her eyes to fill with an unholy light. The Count was her favorite subject. They knew just about everything about the Count except for his real name. They even had transcripts from some of his meetings with the Minister of Magic. Tom did notice all of the meetings had Acturus Black in attendance.

Christina led Tom into the Great Hall. Like most of the school, the Hall had a cold, forbidding feeling. She led Tom to the front of the room. Long benches for the students to sit filled the room; one for each year. At the head of the room was a raised stage with the staff table much like Hogwarts. In the center of the staff table at this school however sat a Dark Lord.

Grindelwald sat in casual conversation with some of the professors waiting for the students to arrive. He looked up with a smile when he noticed their approach. Tom noticed the smile never reached his eyes. The eyes were coldly assessing and judging.

The Dark Lord said, "Welcome Professor Raven and Mr. Slytherin. Please join us." He gestured to two open seats on his right hand side.

Tom had expected to be seated with the other Sixth year students. But now he was guided to a seat one step to the right of the Dark Lord. Christina sat immediately to his right while the wizard who served as the Deputy Headmaster sat on his left. Professor Helena sat at the far end of the table from Tom. Tom was sure it was due entirely to her massive size rather than a low placement in Grindelwald's esteem. Serena, known to the students as Madam Raven sat on the other side of James. The cool distant witch ignored his arrival as she talked with the wizard on her other side.

The students started to file into the Hall in neat columns. Their feet drummed on the floor as they marched to their assigned positions.

The First years were obvious as they lacked the older students' coordination as they marched to the position at the center table.

Christina leaned over and whispered, "Aren't you glad you didn't have to march in with them? I always hated that part. The First years sit in the center, then Second and Third year on either side of them. So the even numbered years are on the left hand side of the Hall and the off numbered years on the right."

Tom automatically glanced at the two outside tables and noted they did contain the older looking students. "Why?"

The Dark Witch smirked. "To keep the years from fighting in the Hall. There is great honor in defeating the class above you. You are outside that structure but the Dark Lord will be most disappointed in his apprentice if anyone were to surpass you."

'Great,' Tom thought. 'I'm going to be the target of choice for all of bloody school.'

All the students stood at rigid attention behind their seats. A barked shout from the Head Boy caused them all to be seated. Grindelwald rose from his seat once they were all seated. All noise in the room ceased as the Dark Lord looked down on them.

"Greetings, my students. Welcome to another glorious year at the Dumstrang Academy of Magic. You have accepted the responsibility to learn the proper use of your magic. As the elite of the magical world, I expect you to show me the intelligence, diligence and dedication to excel in your studies. Do not disappoint me."

Tom almost shuddered in his seat. Grindelwald's greeting was delivered in pleasant tones, but the threat was unmistakable.

Grindelwald continued. "I have good news for all of you. Professor Raven has return to us after too long away on other business. I am sure you all look forward to once again learning from the best magical fighter in all of Europe."

Tom resisted the impulse to lean over and ask Christina if the Count had left the continent. Since they assumed the Count was dead, Tom

couldn't very well use him to tease the Dark Witch now. Besides, from what Tom had seen the Christina's claim may well be true. She was definitely in the same league as the Count now.

"I am also pleased to announce I have accepted an apprentice." If the room had been silent before, now the silence was deafening. "Mr. Slytherin will be attending many classes with the Sixth years when he is not in training with me. Mr. Slytherin is the Heir to the great wizard Salazar Slytherin. I am certain that all of you will do your utmost to welcome and assist my apprentice throughout this school year. Mr. Slytherin, would you please stand?"

Pushing himself to his feet, Tom used his Occlumency training to keep his expression blank. The students did not clap, smile, or react in any visible way. Rather, Tom felt them weighing and judging him. After a minute, the Dark Lord motioned to him to sit.

Grindelwald turned back to the students. "Now enjoy your feast. " He snapped his fingers and food appeared on the tables. With only a light murmur of conversation, the students started to eat.

A mug filled with a hot cider appeared in front of Tom. "Drink this. You look as if you need it." Tom looked at the speaker in some surprise. Serena had been ignoring him since his arrival. Now she acted concerned about him?

Tom nodded politely, "Thank you, Madam. This has been rather a surprise to me." The witch gave him an acknowledging nod and returned to her previous conversation.

Tom settled in to eat his own meal whilst watching the staff and students around him. He sipped his cider and thought about all he was seeing and hearing. It was all so different from Hogwarts. Tom felt as if his soul was being torn in two different directions. A part of him missed his old school and his friends. Thoughts of his family confused him. His father was a hypocrite, but hadn't he saved him from the orphanage rather than kill him? Thoughts of his mother, Katie, Michael, Tia, and Ron came to mind. How would mum feel about him learning the Dark Arts?

However, looking around this room, Tom felt an addictive pull, power. There was a great power here in this school. The Dark Lord could assist him in reaching the height of magical power. With magical power would come other types of power, political, economic and social. No one would ever be able to dictate to him ever again.

2 September 1943

Tom made his way down to the Charms classroom for the first day of class. He had eaten breakfast the next morning in his room. The thought of eating in the formal setting of the staff table was a bit daunting this early in the morning. His decision was confirmed when he stepped out of the Dark Lord's tower and into the school proper.

The students were milling around making their way to their first day of classes. Gone was the military-like precision from last night's dinner. The students were still dressed in the severe school uniform but they looked more relaxed. However, there was no sound of laughter or shouting in the hall which marked it as distinctly different than the Hogwarts's halls would be right now.

Since he was not a 'student' Tom did not wear the same uniform they did. Instead he wore the formal robes of a Dark Army officer. His presence was noted as soon as he stepped out of the tower. No one said anything, but they all paused momentarily when he appeared. As he started walking towards the Charms classroom a pathway opened in front of him through the students. All of the students stayed a respectful distance away from him.

Tom was glad for his Dark Army robe as he made his way down the hall. Although it was still early September the school was cold as it sat atop the Alps. The fireplaces were only lit when called for in magical rituals or by teachers wishing to communicate via Floo. Thick robes and warming charms was all the students had outside their dorm robes. Charms kept frost from forming in the halls and classrooms. If not for them the school would soon be layered in a thick blanket of snow and ice.

The door to the Charms class appeared out of the gloom of the hallway. Tom stepped into the room to receive his first surprise of the day.

“Good morning, Mr. Slytherin. So glad you could join us.”

Tom struggled to keep the surprise from showing on his face. It was a difficult struggle. “Good morning, Professor Helena. How are you this morning?”

The huge half-troll witch smiled mischievously. If not for the fact Tom had already grown accustomed to her appearance, he would have been terrified by that smile. It still made him slightly nervous, just for different reasons now. “I bet you didn’t expect to see me until you Physical Training class.” Her smile grew larger. “My troll heritage makes me highly resistant to spells. It means I am relatively safe when irresponsible students let their spells get away.”

Any further conversation was disrupted by the arrival of the students. Tom moved into the room and selected a chair. The classroom was setup in a U around the professor’s desk. Tom chose a seat at the top of the U where no one sat behind him.

A Sixth year student dropped into the open chair next to Tom. The student made no attempt to talk to Tom but Tom could feel the boy’s scrutiny through his pretended indifference. Tom ignored him and pulled out his Charms text.

Professor Helena impressed Tom in that class. Her style was very different then the diminutive Professor Flitwick, but they both seemed to take a great deal of enjoyment out of the teaching process. The class focused on focused on protective charms. The class ended with the students casting a protective charm on an egg. Professor Helena then hit them all with a Crushing Hex. If your egg survived intact, you passed the day’s lesson. Tom’s egg survived but the egg of the young wizard next to him never even shook when hit by the hex. The boy seemed to smirk at Tom in triumph without ever really looking up.

Transfiguration and Potions followed the same pattern. Tom’s status as the Dark Lord’s apprentice separated him from the other students and it none of them seemed willing to approach him. However, they all seemed to mark his progress against their own. Tom spent a silent evening in his room after a uncomfortable dinner at the staff table.

ADAD

Friday morning broke the pattern of Tom being ignored by the other students.

The morning started off exactly like the preceding day. Tom ate breakfast alone in his room before making his way to his only class of the day. It would be a double and fill the entire morning up until lunch.

Tom walked into the Dark Arts classroom and moved toward the raised seats. He was stopped by the professor.

“Please join me at the head of the room, Mr. Slytherin.” Christina called him. “You will assist me with practical demonstrations.”

Tom shrugged and moved to the indicated position. After the last month of dueling with Christina and James before that, facing a room full of his fellow Sixth years did not seem to be anything to get nervous about.

The students filed into the room. Again, none made any comment or indication of Tom’s presence, but he knew that all noticed him. Christina waited until all of them were seated before she began.

The Dark Witch walked confidently to stand in front of the class. She surveyed them with a cold eye. When she spoke, her voice was even colder. “When I left you, you were completing your Third year of studies. Since then you have done well enough to pass your OWLS to attend this class. Very well, now we shall see if you have truly earned your position in my class. You will each duel Mr. Slytherin. If you survive, I will assess your performance and decide who goes and who stays. The Dark Arts are not for the weak of mind or determination. I will not waste my time on incapable students.” Tom’s stomach clenched at the thought of fighting twenty-six students in one on one duels.

Christina picked a student at random. She pointed at the young wizard, “You shall be our first trial, Mr. Schlagel.” She looked at the rest of the students. “Rest assured anyone we do not get to today will be tested at our next class.”

Tom recognized the boy from his classes the previous day. He appeared to fall somewhere in the middle ranks for magical power.

Tom dropped his wand into his hand as he stepped onto the dueling mat. Then he waited.

Schlagel stepped onto the dueling mat with his wand drawn and pointed towards Tom. The Sixth year did not seem to be taking any chances of Tom launching an ambush. Once he reached the traditional dueling distance, the young wizard moved into a classic dueling stance and waited.

And waited. And waited.

The watching students started to stir and mutter as the time seemed to drag out. They all expected the Dark Lord's apprentice to launch an all out attack on his opponent but instead he just stood with his wand at his side.

Schlagel couldn't take it anymore. The stress of anticipating Tom's attack was causing him to sweat. He gripped his wand tighter and muttered a spell. A sickly purple pulse of light shot straight for Tom's chest.

The tightening of his grip had been all the warning Tom needed. Tom gently swayed to the side allowing the spell to pass by him unhindered. Tom was mildly impressed that even with his nervousness; his opponent resisted the urge to shout the spell he cast.

A second and third spell followed the first. Tom never raised his shields. He simply stepped just out of their path as James had taught him. Since achieving his animal form, this had become easier then ever. The students were starting to jeer his opponent. Focused on hitting Tom, the young wizard missed the cumulative effect of Tom's dodges until it was too late.

Tom darted in and jumped at his opponent with a spinning heel kick to Schlagel's right knee. The knee buckled with an audible pop. The wizard dropped to the ground with a shriek of agony and clutching his knee. Tom bent over and picked the wizard's wand off the floor and calmly handed it to Christina.

The Dark Witch calmly accepted the wand and walked over to her student. "You lost. Take your wand and go get yourself fixed up. Come to my office this afternoon."

The Sixth year's face was pale from the pain but he nodded and struggled to his one good leg. He cast modified Body-Bind Curse on his leg. It froze the limb in place allowing him to immobilize the limb and hop to the Hospital Wing.

Once the boy was off the platform, Christina picked out a dark haired witch sitting on the end of the front row. "You're next."

The witch strode confidently to her starting position with her wand at her side. Tom silently cast a spell and waited for her to start. The witch's arm snapped up like it was spring loaded to fire off her first spell.

Tom never raised his hand from waist level. Silently he cast, "*Bombus lux*." The room filled with a thunderclap as a brilliant light flared from the tip of Tom's wand.

The rest of the room was stunned as a result of the spell. Even Christina seemed to have been taken by surprise. Tom took advantage of this time to disarm his opponent and cast a spell to bind her with ropes. He also removed the protection charm from his own eyes and ears.

Tom waited until Christina seemed to shake off the effects of the charm. In a casual tone he said, "Next?"

Christina smirked in return. "Mr. Krieger!"

The Sixth year who sat next to Tom in Charms rose from his seat in the middle of the students. The young wizard dropped lightly to the ground. Tom noticed he moved lightly on his feet, ready to move instantly in any direction. All the signs said here was a very well trained opponent.

As Tom continued to assess his new opponent, he noticed Krieger's eyes. The calm, black eyes gave him a look of absolute hatred. Not the typical schoolyard antagonism he had known with Alajos

Sardennes. This was a flat out hatred Tom had not encountered since the orphanage.

The two opponents studied each other looking for a sign that an attack was imminent. Even watching, Tom was almost taken flat footed by the first spell.

The dim yellow ball of spell energy screamed past Tom's head, only missing by two inches. He had barely ducked in time. Even so the side of his face went numb from the passage of the near-miss. A second spell followed closely behind the first spell but this time Tom's shields were in place.

Tom wanted to get the initiative back. He fired a brace of quick spells. Not to defeat his opponent, just to put him on the defensive.

"Corycus, Fucotig, Corycus, Fucotig Perfringo!"

The Punch Spell and the Paint-Ball Hex were both quick spells to cast and used little energy. Tom wasn't too concern with aiming the spells. The Punch Spell was great from draining shields and the Paint-Ball Hex would leave be a good distraction. He just wanted Krieger to have to pay attention to them. The Bone-Shattering Curse that followed it up was a different story. The curse came in low to the ground near knee level.

Krieger side stepped the first Punch Spell. The first set of paint balls clipped him on the shoulder. The German wizard was surprised by their physical impact and the paint dripping from his shoulder. His distraction allowed the second Punch Spell to connect. He grunted as his magic flared to reinforce the Shield Spell. The second set of paint balls passed to the wizard's left.

The Bone-Shattering Curse smashed into the Shield Spell. The shield absorbed most of the curse's energy but some passed through as the shield collapsed. Krieger grunted as the spell impacted on his left shin.

Tom did not have time to follow up on his hit. Even as the curse hit his leg, Krieger flailed his wand around and cast the Fire Whip Curse. A whip made of a fiery substance appeared out of the end of the

wand. The whip snapped through the air at Tom. Acting instinctually, Tom raised his left arm to block the whip. It wrapped around his arm, burning through the thick material of his robe.

Pulling back against the Fire Whip, Tom cast a silent '*Sectumsemptra!*'

The silent spell flew directly down the top of the fire whip until it reached the wizard's wand. The magic sliced through the top of the wand cutting the front third of the wand off. The spell continued into Krieger's hand, entering between the second and third knuckle and creating a two inch deep gash.

Tom almost groaned in relief as the Fire Whip Curse failed with the destruction of the casting wand. He cast a numbing charm on his arm to deaden the pain.

The destruction of Krieger's wand meant the end of the duel. Christina walked over to Krieger. The young wizard knelt on the dueling platform attempting to bind his hand with a piece of cloth. Blood dripped from between the mangled remains of his hand. Christina told him to stand up and cast a healing charm on the hand. The major bleeding stopped but not all of it. The Dark Witch raised an eyebrow at that since she expected her spell to completely heal the Sixth year's hand. Something about that spell tickled her memory.

The Dark Witch did not allow any of her surprise to show. "That should hold you until you reach the Hospital Wing. Now go."

Once Krieger was gone, she walked over to Tom. In a voice pitched so only Tom could hear here, she said, "Krieger was known to be the best dueler in the school. He won the all-school end of the year dueling competition last year. He beat all of last year's Sixth and Seventh years."

Tom kept his emotions in check as he asked, "Is that why he hates me? Because I am a threat to his status?"

Christina smiled with dark amusement glittering in her eyes. "Well that ... and the fact that there was talk that the Dark Lord would

choose him to be his apprentice. Krieger sees you as having stolen his rightful place.”

“Oh, that’s just bloody wonderful.”

Christina just winked at him and turned away. She addressed the class. “Three students tested and already two in the Hospital Wing. I am glad this is a Friday or the other teachers may have been upset with me.” She pointed at a random boy. “You, you’re next.”

ADAD

Tom dropped exhausted into his bed. He had fought fourteen students in a three hour class. Krieger’s fight had been the toughest but by no means the longest of the fourteen fights. Nine students were sent to the Hospital Wing. Tom would have gone too if not for the healing potions Serena provided him when he reached his room.

And to think, he got to fight the rest of them at the next class! Thank Merlin Dad insisted on training him!

17 December 1943

Tom walked out of the Potions classroom in a confident stride. The winter holidays were set to start the next day and Professor Ogglet had decided to give the Sixth year students a mini-NEWT exam to remind them not to slack off their Sixth year. Tom was confident he’d done exceedingly well on the test.

No students called for Tom to wait for them and none of them dared to approach him without his invitation. After more than four months of as the Dark Lord’s apprentice, the students knew not to approach Tom Slytherin too closely. Originally they isolated Tom out of jealousy, now it was out of fear.

The week after the duels in Christina’s Dark Arts class, Krieger had sought Tom out with a new wand in hand. After avoiding the German wizard’s initial attack from ambush, Tom demonstrated his improvement in casting Dark spells. He used the same Poisoned Arrow Spell he had tried on Christina. This time the three arrows formed a tight cluster around his opponent’s heart. The paralysis

poison completed the job by causing his heart to stop beating. After that, the students left the boy they were already calling the Dark Apprentice very much alone.

Tom was making his way to the Master's Tower when he heard a commotion coming from the entrance hall. He altered his path out of idle curiosity.

Two of his Lord's senior Solders were standing in the hall. What were obviously two bodies was floating next to them. The Dark Solders had conjured sheets the hid the bodies from view, but Tom guessed they were the groundskeeper and the Flying instructor who had gone missing two weeks ago. Christina and Helena were approaching as Tom came to a stop in front of the wizards.

"Where did you find them?" Christina called out before Tom could say anything.

The senior Solder made a short bow and answered, "They were on a small rise on the mountain south of here. They must have landed for some reason and been attacked by the dire wolves. Jonas's throat was torn out. Mythos was hamstrung but he must have fought them off. His leg is partially healed. He must have passed out from the blood loss and froze to death "

Tom knew better but did not say anything. Since September he had felt James moving around outside the school's wards trying to contact him. The Occlumency shields he had taught Tom kept James from making contact. However, Tom felt the flair of triumph from James the night the two wizards disappeared whilst on patrol. It was not the dire wolves who killed the two wizards, but a different wolf entirely. However, Tom held his tongue.

Christina frowned at the report. "Take them to the headquarters and continue the investigation. I want to ensure it was an accident and the injuries were not caused by magic." She turned to Tom. "Our master would like to see you in his quarters."

Tom nodded and turned on his heel to walk away. He did not need to ask when the Dark Lord wanted him. The answer was always

immediately. Professor Helena caught up to Tom in just a couple of steps.

“Oh, Tommy-boy, were you a baaaad boy?” the large professor asked in a teasing voice. The half-troll witch and Christina were the only ones in the school who would dare do such a thing.

“Possibly,” he allowed in a dry voice. “He may have heard about the incident with your wand yesterday.”

Helena chuckled in remembrance. “I would love to know how you managed to switch my wand with a fake. I know you didn’t enter my room before your class.”

Tom shrugged. “I never admitted that I was the one who took your wand. I merely found it on the floor.”

The Charms professor snorted. “We did not have any pranks before this term. Then they suddenly started. We must have a precocious Firstie or two.”

“Or an older student decided to reveal his inner prankster.” Tom offered.

“Possibly,” the professor allowed mimicking Tom’s earlier tone of voice.

The odd pair entered the Master’s tower and rode the magic to the second highest level. Only the Dark Lord’s office and personal quarters occupied this level. The highest level held a conference room with a panoramic view of the mountains surrounding the school.

Tom moved to knock on Grindelwald’s office when Helena stopped him. “No, he’s in here.” She knocked on the door to Grindelwald’s quarters.

“Enter,” a voice called from within.

Helena preceded Tom into Grindelwald’s private room. Tom had never been allowed to enter this room before. He used the

opportunity to observe as he entered the room. What he found slightly surprised him.

The room reminded Tom of the Ravenclaw common room. Shelves of books lined the inner wall. A sealed glass case held several ancient looking texts. A pair of large windows provided a gorgeous view of the mountains.

Tom was suddenly stunned as a new sensation hit him.

He was hot.

For the first time since leaving Hamburg, Tom actually felt warm. His gaze turned to a large fireplace burning merrily against the one wall. Tom felt a desire to walk over to warm up at the fire.

"I admit I enjoy the feeling of being warm more than a proper Headmaster of Durmstrang should."

Tom turned to face the speaker. "Yes, milord. This room does remind me more of Ravenclaw than Durmstrang."

The Dark Lord laughed easily however Tom noted his eyes never changed. "Yes, you can take the wizard out of Ravenclaw, but you can't take Ravenclaw out of the wizard. But tell me my young Slytherin, how is it you are familiar with the Ravenclaw common room? I am sure things have not changed that much in my old school."

"Professor Evans knew all of the Houses passwords. I was able to get them from him," Tom answered. Technically that was all true. James did know all the passwords and Tom received the Marauder's Map from James. The Map listed all of the common room passwords.

"Very cunning, Mr. Slytherin. Much what one would expect of your vaunted line. Now, please have a seat. We have much to discuss." The Dark Lord turned to Helena. "Thank you, my dear. Leave us now please."

Helena curtsied in an almost dainty fashion. "Yes, milord." She turned and left without another word.

A sudden insight hit Tom. Helena was in love with Grindelwald. He almost laughed at the absurdity of the idea. Grindelwald merely raised an ironic eyebrow. Tom realized the Dark Lord knew about the witch's crush.

"Tom, I am sure you have asked why I worked so hard to bring you here and make you my apprentice." At Tom's affirming nod, Grindelwald continued. "I did not originally plan on approaching you. I need something your ancestor left behind. A piece of knowledge only you will be able to procure for me. Have you ever heard of a Horcrux?"

Tom pled ignorance. He did not want to reveal how he knew of the Dark objects. Grindelwald spent the next twenty minutes explaining the use of Horcrux and roughly how they are created. It was all stuff Tom had heard before although James's explanation was a bit less detailed.

"Salazar Slytherin gathered all the knowledge in the world on Horcruxes and stored it in his Chamber of Secrets. My sources say only an Heir of Slytherin can access the room. They also must be sufficiently Dark to read the proper material. Originally, I planned on using your maternal uncle to retrieve the texts. I believe you were a Second year during that raid? Securing young Nott would have been a nice bonus but it was mostly to raid the Chamber. His death at the Count's hands seriously derailed my plans."

"Why do you need a Horcrux, sir?" Tom asked.

"Do you know why I was exiled from Britain?"

"No, sir."

Grindelwald leaned back into the chair he was sitting in. "After leaving Hogwarts, I became obsessed with discovering a way to study new worlds and travel through time. The Ministry frowned on my efforts and sought to discourage me. The great magical philosopher Michael Britanious visited the Great Library of Alexandria shortly before those stupid, superstitious Muggles burnt it down. He wrote a great treatise from the material there for opening gates between worlds. The Ministry refused me access to his work, so I tried to steal it. My old

friends Albus Dumbledore and Thomas Potter learnt of my plan and thwarted me. After a brief trial, I was exiled.”

The Dark Lord’s attention had moved from Tom to staring into the fire as he talked. After a brief pause he continued. “Although the scrolls were now out of my reach I continued my research and eventually managed to make contact with a plane of existence very different than ours. Most people would refer to it as Hell. Actually the proper name would be the Prime Plane of Fire. It really has nothing to do with our dead, but the creatures of the plane gave rise to our modern images of demons and devils. Through the use of certain rituals, we can pull these creatures through Gates and bind them to our will. Also, this plane opens onto countless others.”

“Have you traveled there, Master?”

Grindelwald smiled, “You have hit on the core of the problem, my young friend. If I travel there, I can open Gates to the other realms. However, the transition through the Gate is deadly to humans. Only someone with a Horcrux can survive the passage. So you see why I need you.”

Tom nodded, “You need me to access the Chamber and retrieve the correct text. You also need me to be Dark enough to translate it for me.”

The Dark Lord smiled pleasantly. “I understand you have taken to our training like the natural you are. Christina tells me you have become quite accomplished and is pleased with your progress. Serena tells me you are very gifted academically also. It is exceedingly rare for those two sisters to agree on anything. You are to be commended.”

Tom bowed his head. “Thank you, master”

“Now, I have a special treat for you, Tom. Archipedous, would you care to join us?”

It took all of Tom’s self control to hold himself in place as a demon emerged from the fire. The creature gave Tom a considering look before turning to the Dark Lord. In a voice that sounded *burnt*, the

creature said, "It took ye long enough, wizard. I tire of this cold plane. Release me or come through with me."

"Silence, slave. You will do my will." The Dark Lord sounded almost nonchalant, but his voice had an undercurrent of effort. There was a moment of silence between the Dark Lord and the creature known as Archipedous. Then the demon gave a slight nod of submission.

Grindelwald turned back to Tom. "As you can see, the 'demons' must be subjugated to our will. But they make excellent servants once they have been broken to our will. They have visited countless worlds over the eons and have a great deal of knowledge gathered from their visits." Grindelwald frowned at the demon and said to Tom, "They even claim to know the answer to the age old question of does time travel alter history or create a new universe, but they refuse to share their answer like they refuse to share all of their knowledge."

The demon grunted, "Told ye 'fore. Only access information in real world. Travelers bound from sharing."

With a sigh of frustration, Grindelwald translated. "He claims all demons leaving their plane are prevented from sharing their knowledge. They consider the Fire Plane to be the only truly real world since they can access all of us."

'Return to your home for now, Archipedous. I will summon you later before I begin the next ritual.'

"Yes, master." The demon turned and jumped back into the fire as it flared and was gone.

Once the fire died back down to its normal size, Grindelwald dismissed Tom. "I will be gone for a few weeks. The school will be in break and I must coddle my Muggle puppet. He becomes increasingly unstable and the potions are not working as well as they once did. I will call for you on my return. Continue your studies."

Tom rose and bowed at the dismissal. As he made his way to his room one level down he thought about all he had seen and heard that night. Reaching his room, Tom failed to reach a conclusion.

10 March 1944 – Durmstrang

Tom's seventeenth birthday had passed unremarked. He was not even sure they were aware of when his birthday was. The Dark Lord and Christina were all away most of the holiday break. The only person he saw on the 1st of January was Serena and that was only to deliver yet another vile tasting potion. Tom asked a house-elf for a piece of cake and celebrate his crossing to adult wizard status alone. He imagined his mother and the two sets of twins celebrating at the same time in their Hogsmeade home.

The next two month's Tom threw himself further and further into his studies. The spells and rituals he was reading fascinated him.

He idly wondered if the Tom Riddle of Harry Potter's world had spent time with the Dark Lord also. James told him that Tom created his first Horcrux during the summer after his Sixth year. Could that Tom have delivered Slytherin's text to the Dark Lord and learned to make them also? That Tom would not have had to spend time compensating for the weakness James Evans introduced into him. Evans said that the last Gaunt died by Riddle's hand so obviously the Dark Lord never found him.

A knock on the door broke Tom from his thoughts. Christina and Helena entered the room without his response. The Darkness in Tom called for him to punish them for their temerity but he knew the Dark Lord would punish him in turn.

Christina almost pranced into the room bubbling over with enthusiasm. Helena entered the room at a more restrained pace.

"We come bearing good news!" the Dark Witch cheerful called as she danced into the room.

Tom set his text down and leaned forward in his chair. "And what would that news be?"

Christina smiled at Helena and said, "He is practicing his menacing Dark Lord expression."

The half-troll witch shook her head with a grin, "No, it is his imitation Serena expression of 'You've interrupted my studying. Prepare to die,' look."

Christina looked thoughtful, "You may be right..."

"You had something to tell me?" Tom growled.

Christina smiled, "Lord Grindelwald has set a date for you to return to Hogwarts and retrieve Slytherin's writings."

"And that would be?" Tom prompted.

"The twentieth of June. Hogwarts gets out on the fifteenth this year. By the time we arrive the school should be empty of staff and students. We can slip in, get what we need, and get out with none the wiser."

Tom had to ask, "We?"

The Dark Witch smiled. "Helena and I will be accompanying you. I know the Dark Lord wishes for this to be a quiet mission, but I can't help hoping for another shot at the Count."

I will be going to keep an eye on both of you," Helena rumbled.

Tom smirked at her, "I almost hope we run into Professor Flitwick." Seeing her questioning look he added, "He is the assistant Charms professor at Hogwarts."

"Is he a big, strong wizard to match me?"

"Nope," Tom grinned. "I think he is a half-goblin and he's shorter than a First year. But he was a dueling champion before becoming a teacher."

Christina joined Tom laughing at the mental picture. Helena, however, looked thoughtful.

Recovering from his laughter, Tom focused on Christina, "So tell me the Dark Lord's plan for my triumphant return to my old school."

The planning went long into the night.

6 June 1944 – Durmstrang

All of the preparations were in place for the mission to Hogwarts to commence. The Durmstrang students had left to return home for the summer holidays two days previous. Tom never really grew to know any of them. After his treatment of their school hero, Krieger, none of them wanted to get too close to Tom and he only saw them as target dummies for his new Dark curses anyway.

It was late in the evening when Helena found him in the Durmstrang library. Serena was working at inventorying the school's books. The 'Librarian from Hell' had been groaning about the condition of the returned books all evening.

Helena came striding into the library and called out, "Tom, I have been looking for you." The Charms professor ignored the librarian's black looks at the noise in *her* library.

"I have been here all evening," he answered without looking up.

Helena came to a stop in front of his table. "We just received word from the Muggles that the British and American Muggle fleet has started bombarding part of the French coast. It looks like the prelude to a full invasion. The Dark Lord wants us to be ready to leave on our mission immediately."

Tom nodded but he wasn't really listening. He was thinking about the emotions he had felt through the link to James Evans. Since March the feelings of fear, concern and frustration had been increasing exponentially. But earlier that night that had all faded into one emotion: Anticipation. Tom knew James Evans was somewhere near by and had been all year, but something had changed. Tom searched for it.

Suddenly, he knew what was missing. He could feel nothing through the link!

"Helena, I th..."

The entire castle rumbled as a sudden shaking struck the school. Dust filled the air as the shaking stopped.

“What was that?” Helena asked in a bewildered voice.

Before Tom could answer, Serena was at his side with one of her ever present potions. She forced it into his hand. “Take this and be quick about it.” Used to her demands Tom complied without arguing.

Tom looked up at Helena and dryly said, “I believe that was Christina getting her wish.”

“Her wish?”

Tom grinned without humor. “Yes, the old saying, ‘Be careful what you wish for.’ Have you heard it?” Helena nodded trying to figure out where Tom was going. “Well, I believe that was the Count knocking on the door and leaving his calling card. I think he want to come in.”

Helena’s eyes went big as Tom’s comment set in. “Come, we must go find Christina. We have a fight to prepare for.”

As he followed behind his huge Charms professor, Tom thought, ‘This should be interesting.’

A/N: Guess what comes next...

Chapter 37 – Storm Strike

6 June 1944

James crouched alongside the cave wall and braced himself. Rockjaw's goblin team would soon deliver on their promise to breach the Durmstrang wards. It had been slow going to work their way through the cave system to reach a cave near the Durmstrang underground recreation cavern. The rest of the team waited a short distance away either resting or talking in hushed voices.

The various magical creatures inhabiting the area made the work dangerous. The giants and trolls were not much of an issue. The cave entrances were too small for the giants to enter and a subtle ward diverted the trolls. The dire wolves recognized James as one of their own in human form. Their heavy presence around the cave mouth helped to keep the trolls and yeti out of the area. The large humanoids may have been willing to fight a wolf or two, but not the whole pack working together.

It was the creatures inside the caves that provided the greatest challenge. A large number of magical creepy crawlies inhabited the underground labyrinth. Claude was nearly bitten by an adolescent acromantula. Only quick spell work by Charlie prevented the large spider from biting the French Auror.

The largest obstacle was the unexpected presence of a large contingent of dwarves. James had to negotiate their passage with the dwarf chief, Broadaxe. The colony of miners lived deep under the mountain and had little interaction or interest in the magical humans living above them. However, the dwarves saw the goblins as a direct threat to their territory. James had to pay the dwarves to allow the goblins to work in the caves.

Once the goblins started their work James expected to be assaulting Durmstrang within weeks. The weeks dragged into months. First the goblins took longer than they expected to pierce the wards without setting off alarms. Once the wards dropped it would be obvious an attack was underway, but they had to be careful not to trigger the alarms before they were ready to bring the wards down.

The next delay was caused by Dumbledore's arrival a month later than expected. The Hogwarts's Transfiguration professor only arrived last week. The British Muggles and their American allies were on high alert for any movement between the British Isles and the mainland. The Muggle militaries were preparing for the invasion of France by huge numbers of amphibious troops. The additional Muggle security measures made it difficult even for a wizard to cross the Channel unnoticed.

In the end the Ministry of Magic worked out a deal with Prime Minister Churchill and the Defense Ministry. The Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower (a squib), knew of the relationship between the magical and Muggle wars. The British PM and American general agreed to allow the wizard passage and assistance in return for cooperation on the timing of the magical attack. As a father, James was furious over the delay. However as an Unspeakable and a British citizen, he had also understood their reasons.

So now James crouched against the cave wall almost three months after his meeting with Serena. A slight scruff of a shoe on the cave floor alerted James of someone's approach. He looked up to see Rockjaw approaching with his entire crew trailing behind him. In his hand he held a small box with a red button on the top. A wire led from the box back the way he had come.

The goblin stomped up to James and thrust the box into his hand with a toothy grin. "The wards are balanced on a toothpick. Press that button and the whole ward structure collapses."

Rockjaw's second in command, Bloodspit, snickered. "That is not all that's going to happen."

James stood and gave the goblins a slight bow. "Thank you, Rockjaw. I take it this is exactly what it looks like?" The goblin's grin grew as he nodded. "Your payment is already on deposit with the London Gringott's branch. Thank you for your efforts."

Rockjaw returned the polite bow. "Count, May your enemies' bloods run cold."

"And may your pockets be ever full with gold," James said in reply.

The goblins left to make their way back to camp as James wordlessly summoned the rest of his team. James smiled at his grandfather, Chaz Potter, and Albus Dumbledore as they moved next to him. Beyond them were Claude and Abraxus Malfoy. Charlie stood paired with one of the unexpected guests Dumbledore brought with him, Professor Flitwick. The other two surprise guests were currently out of sight.

Maria stood a short distance away. The reason she would not be accompanying them slept in a silenced wizarding tent in the next cave. The witch refused to wait at the farm house and wanted to be on hand to act as a medic. Little Alan would be safe in the tent whilst Maria guarded their retreat.

James closed his eyes and called on his Occlumency skills to calm his mind to a completely focused state. "Let's review the plan one last time," he started. "Once the wards are breached we move across the pitch and up the stairs into the school proper. You all have copies of the map Selena provided us. Charlie, you and Malfoy will remain at the top of the stairs to secure our retreat. The rest of us will move to the base of the central tower. Chaz and Filius, you secure the base of the tower. Albus, Thomas and I will move up the tower to find Tom. He should be in his room or the private library nearby."

"You all heard what Serena told me about Tom Evan's treatment whilst he was here. Be careful and be prepared for anything. When we find him I will approach him. If he attacks you remember Stunners only. Anyone doing him harm will answer to me." James looked at each member of the team to ensure they were clear on this point.

Thomas Potter added, "This boy is my grandson in all but blood. I get the leftovers from anything the Count leaves behind." James smiled briefly under his Unspeakable hood at his grandfather's comments.

He returned to his briefing. "Remember, once the wards are breached, they are going to know something is up. There are no students left in the school except Tom. All of the adults in the castle are to be considered hostile combatants except Serena. She was instructed to lock herself in her room once the wards come down so she should not be in our zones."

“We don’t know if Grindelwald is in the school or not. Once word of the Muggle landings in France reaches Germany, he could be anywhere. If he is here, back off and let Albus handle him. If Tom is not in the tower we will start a search of the school and hope we find him quickly. If Charlie and Malfoy are pushed back from the cave stairs, we use our brooms as an alternative escape route. The school’s Apparition and Pore key wards will still be up so don’t try to use either until you are clear of the school. Is everyone clear?”

When there were no questions, James said, “Okay, everyone, take your positions.

The magical wave caused by the Durmstrang ward’s localized collapse was almost unnoticeable in the roar of the explosion caused by the Muggle explosives laid down by the goblins. A simple spell cleared the air of dust so the strike team could move through the new entry into the Quidditch cavern.

Rocks the size of a man’s head lay scattered around the pitch as James led the way. Debris was scattered 50 meters from the new tunnel. The cavern was lit although no one was using it. Serena told them the cavern had twelve hours of ‘daylight’ every day because of the live plants.

The team moved easily through the cavern and to the bottom of the stairs. A quick check did not reveal anyone responding to the ward breach. They moved quickly up the stairs.

They met their first resistance at the top of the stairs. James-the-wolf burst out of the stairs to the surprise of the wizard standing guard there. Surprised by the wolf’s appearance, the wizard barely had time to point his wand at James before Thomas hit him with a silent Stunning Spell.

The team did not stop moving as they passed by the unconscious wizard without a word. Charlie and Malfoy dropped out of the formation and took defensive positions. Charlie casually transfigured the wizard into a child’s block and flicked it into an out of the way corner. Malfoy gave a grunt of approval of her skill as he kept watch.

ADAD

The British strike team found the majority of the Durmstrang staff assembled at the base of the central tower. The staff was assembling in response to the alarms of the wards being breached. Fifteen teachers and other supporting staff were gathered and being assigned tasks.

James did not know this but about half the staff was Dark Soldiers assigned to the school for added security. The remainder, including most of the professors, were everyday witches and wizards. All of them were highly competent in their fields, but they were not really trained to fight as a unit. Although the school staff did maintain and practice emergency drills for use during the school year, they never really considered what to do during the summer months; a common error in human judgment.

James paused briefly to assess the situation from around the corner. He made a couple of brief hand gestures and stepped out into the entry hall. As he cleared the corner, James dug deep and pushed a lot of magic out through his wand.

“Reducto!”

The Blasting Curse had a little too much power behind it. Three of the staff were smashed by the broadly cast spell. Ribs and internal organs shattered by the sudden force of the spell. The remains of the three wizards were thrown into their still living comrades leaving a confusion of bodies scrambling on the floor.

Claude and Chaz moved up on either side of the Count and started their spells. Dumbledore, flanked by Thomas and Flitwick moved to the left of James's trio to attack the Durmstrang staff from the side.

James dodged a Cutting Curse as his shields absorbed an orange colored spell. He heard a gasp as the edge of the Cutting Curse caught Chaz on the arm. James aimed his wand toward where the curse had originated and silently cast, *“Tarantus.”*

Lightning forked out of the wand. The electricity sought to go to ground. The unfortunate wizards and witches in its path without shields raised felt as though they had been hit by a mass Cruciatus

Curse for a split second. Then they found themselves hurled back ten feet.

Pulling his slightly smoking wand back, James noticed the Dumbledore-led trio was working more like snipers. Thomas was using Shield Spells to protect the other two whilst Dumbledore and Flitwick used Stunning Spells and Binding Charms to remove targeted opponents from the fight.

Ninety seconds after starting, the fight was over. While the Durmstrang defenders were all above-average to exceptional in power and skill, the attackers could claim the same. In addition, Dumbledore and James were two of the top ten spell casters in the world. The power difference and the element of surprise made all the difference.

Nine of the Durmstrang staff were dead. James's first spell killed three and the Thunderer Curse killed another three. Chaz accounted for one and Claude the remainder. The survivors had been stunned and bound by Dumbledore's team.

James looked around observing the carnage, "Chaz, Filius, secure this area. Snap all the wands you find and get the survivors out of the way. Keep them bound and stunned. Is your arm okay, Chaz?" Chaz waved it off as he and Flitwick started to carry out their tasks. A quick inspection said the Chaz's minor injury was the most serious of the lot.

The Count, Thomas, Albus and Claude moved into the base of the central tower and stopped at the magical lift device.

"What an amazing development!" Dumbledore smiled whilst observing the lift. "This is Albert's work. We used to argue about the magical theories involved when we were in school."

"This isn't the time Albus," Thomas growled.

Dumbledore seemed to realize where they were. "Oh, quite right, old friend. Quite right."

James ignored the byplay. "Serena told us Tom would be on the third floor from the top. When you step in, think about the floor you want to

go to.” Then he stepped into the lift and started immediately up the tower. He stepped out on the appropriate floor.

He moved into the floor without waiting for the others. After more than a year, he was finally going to get his son back. Anticipation and excitement fought against his Occlumency-induced calm.

The door to the room Serena identified as Tom’s was open. James heard the others arriving on the floor as he stepped into the room.

No one was in the room. James did a quick check and found no signs of anyone hiding here. He did notice the decidedly Dark nature of the books sitting on a neat shelf by the desk.

“Is he here?” Thomas asked from the door.

“No.” The disappointment was thick in James’s voice.

“We are in here, Count.” A voice floated into the room from down the hall. James did not recognize it at first particularly from the scornful emphasis on the word ‘Count’. A fist clenched around his heart as he did recognize the voice.

James and Thomas stepped back out into the hall with Claude and Dumbledore. Claude silently pointed to an open door at the end of the short hall. Light spilled out of the door and into the corridor.

“The door appeared just before young Tom spoke,” Albus said.

Tom called from within the room again. “Come, Count. It is rude to make us wait.”

James motioned for Claude to remain in the hall and watch their backs. The French Auror did not look happy but nodded his acceptance.

James, Thomas and Albus walked into the room with their wands drawn.

It was a large room with a huge fireplace against the outside wall. A large oak table sat between the fireplace and the door. The room

must have been thirty meters from the door to the fireplace with the fireplace two-thirds the way across the room. The room was obviously magically expanded since it was physically impossible for a room this size to be located this high up in the tower. But what caught James's attention was not the room and its décor, but rather who was sitting at the table in front of him.

Seated at the table were three figures. James's eyes immediately sought out his seventeen year old son. Tom looked harder than the brief glimpse James caught of him in Hamburg so long ago. The look of arrogance and greed made him look almost identical to the memory of a sixteen year old that a twelve year old Harry Potter had faced. James felt his heart drop as he realized that everything Serena Raven told him was true.

James reluctantly tore his eyes away from Tom to look at the table's other two occupants. One was Christina. The Dark Witch had a pleased smile on her face mixed with anticipation. With his previous encounters and Serena's reports, it wasn't hard to guess what she was thinking. The final occupant James found intriguing. This was his first meeting with the Dark Lord. Subconsciously, James had been expecting someone like Old Snakeface. Not this urbane, dapper wizard that looked like a successful Muggle banker.

"Ah Albert, I had wondered if we would be seeing you tonight," Albus said with a resigned sigh.

The Dark Lord smiled but it never reached his eyes. "Hello Albus, Thomas. Well this is my school after all. It has been a long time since all three of us were together in one room."

"And it would have been longer if you hadn't stolen my grandson!" Thomas growled.

Christina laughed, "Well at least you came to try to rescue him. I notice his 'father' stayed home."

James was surprised they did not know his real identity. In parseltongue, he hissed, *You never told them about me?*

Tom glared back, *You only stole your ability from the other me. They needed the Heir of Slytherin, not a fake.*

Tom, listen to me. They are using the Slytherin curse against you. They gave you a potion...

Grindelwald suddenly recovered from the shock of hearing his apprentice and the British Unspeakable hissing a conversation. "There are no other parselmouths in the world! We searched everywhere for any signs of one!"

James smirked in his hood. "Sorry Al, but I know of at least four others." *And they really want their big brother home.*

Tom narrowed his eyes in suspicion. *What potion are you speaking of?*

"How can you be a parselmouth?" the Dark Lord demanded. "Mr. Slytherin, stop speaking to him."

Thomas thought of the painting in his office and muttered, "Salazar would love to have heard that."

They had the house-elves put a potion reducing your inhibitions and impulse control.

You're lying! Tom snarled as he rose to his feet. *You just want to use me to prevent the future you came from!* From this range, James could feel Tom's rage through his scar even with his mental shields fully raised.

"Enough!" Grindelwald said in a deadly calm voice. "You will stop addressing my apprentice. Sit Mr. Slytherin." Tom slowly sat back down glaring at James all the while.

"Albert, you must stop this mad pursuit of yours," Albus said in his calm voice. "Your attempts to expand knowledge, while laudable goals, comes at too high a price. The Britanious scrolls have been destroyed as have Slytherin's writings on Horcruxes."

"You lie," Grindelwald asserted. "The Albus Dumbledore I knew would never have allowed the knowledge to be destroyed. You may have hidden them but they still exist."

"Alas, it was not my call to make," sighed Dumbledore. "I would have done exactly as you accused me. However, the Ministry felt they were too dangerous to allow their continuing existence."

"Impossible! No one but my apprentice could enter the Chamber of Secrets!" Then the Dark Lord blinked and turned his glare on the Count. "You. You could enter the Chamber. But how could you know about the journals?"

"Salazar told them, milord," Tom said quietly.

Grindelwald looked stunned. "What did you say, apprentice?"

"The Potters have a magical portrait of Salazar Slytherin together with Godric Gryffindor. The Salazar figure can move to a painting within the Chamber and the real Salazar often talked to it. It must have told them."

Now the Dark Lord looked angry. "The Potters had this? Then it must know the secret or their creation."

"Nope," James said in a cheerful voice. "Slytherin only told it what he was researching. Kind of like a diary." James allowed two small objects to drop out of his sleeve and into his hand. "Now, I have a gift for your apprentice." With that he dropped the objects onto the floor.

The objects were figurines. Once they hit the floor the spells on the small statues released. A small crack was heard and sitting at the Count's feet was a large King Cobra and an even larger black dog. Snuffles gave a happy bark in greeting and wagged his tail.

James felt Tom's anger falter for a moment to be replaced by excitement. But then the rage reasserted itself.

"I felt the young wizard would care to see his familiars again."

Grindelwald grinned evilly. "My grasp on the boy's soul is too firm now. Cute little animals won't help you. Slytherin's curse opens him up to my outside assistance. Darkness is his true home. He will have a glorious destiny!"

"I don't think so, arsehole," James growled.

James tore open the scar link and pushed into Tom's mind. The sudden attack was past Tom's shields before he even realized it was occurring. Once he did he tried to expel James from his mind.

Unlike Voldemort's mental attack on Harry Potter in the Ministry of Magic, James was not attempting to possess Tom. Since he was not trying to mentally grab hold of control, he was able to avoid Tom's expulsion attempts.

"Tom, listen to me!" James mentally cried out. *"They are using the curse to control your mind! The food was laced with potions to weaken your resistance! I cannot lie to you in here!"*

A fresh surge of anger pushed through Tom directed at James. He redoubled his efforts at pushing James out of his mind.

"Mr. Fleetfoot, this is not the behavior of a Marauder!"

"Don't call me that! I am Mr. Slytherin!" Tom screamed back.

"Tom, if you don't break this now you never will. Fight it, son!"

James started throwing memories and emotions through the link. He sent the first meeting in the alley. The moment James told Tom he was adopting him. When he found out Sarah would be his new mum. Images of Nagini and Snuffles running around Hogsmeade and Hogwarts with Tom at different ages. Pranks played by the Revolution. Getting his first broom. Seeing his first Quidditch game. Playing in his first Quidditch game for Slytherin House.

The barrage continued as a continuous stream of images and emotions came through. James felt a lurch in Tom's mind as the first images of Katie and Michael appeared, followed by images of Tia and Ron. A sense of longing leaked back to James.

James altered his flow to focus on the younger Evans children. He showed Tom the missed third birthday for Tia and Ron. How sad the faces looked as they tried to celebrate for the twins yet knowing Tom was missing. James felt Tom twitch when he focused on the sad, crying image of the ever bouncy and happy Katie upset about missing her beloved older brother.

James asked a question across the link. *"How will Katie and the others feel if you never come home? If you turn Dark of your own choice? Because it is your own choice now, Tom Evans."*

"NOOO!"

Now James felt Tom turn his fight inwards. He felt Tom fighting the Darker side of his own soul. The potions opened him to the Dark influence of Slytherin's curse but they did not put the Darkness there. The Darkness always existed. It came out in Tom Riddle. Raised in a hostile, brutal environment, Riddle embraced it. Tom Evans learned to suppress it and channel it.

James could feel Tom was winning his soul back but he was tiring. If not for the counter potions provided by the Durmstrang librarian, Tom would not have had this chance of reclaiming his soul. James sent the strength and support through the link that he could.

The mental battle raged for what seemed hours. Finally an exhausted Tom Evans sealed his Darkness back inside where it came from. James could feel Tom's relief at being free coupled with his extreme exhaustion.

James suddenly found himself back in his own mind and the room coming back into focus. He immediately looked at Tom.

Tom looked up at him with an exhausted smile. "Thanks, Dad." Then Tom slumped into his chair unconscious.

"What did you do to him?" Christina shrieked. She grabbed Tom's hand and tried to wake him. A sudden hiss caused her to jump back.

Nagini had slithered unobserved across the floor and climbed Tom's chair while all the stupid humans were talking. The cobra was now

wrapping itself around Tom's neck and shoulders. It hissed a warning at the Dark Witch that James would have refused to translate in polite company.

"Stupid snake!" she yelled as she pointed her wand towards the snake. "Let me at him!"

"Get away from my son!" James yelled. Snuffles growled his agreement.

Christina froze in shock. "Your son?"

James dropped the hood on the Unspeakable robe. The Obscuration Charm deactivated revealing James Evans. "Yes, my son."

"You're not the Count! You're just that stupid teacher!" the Dark Witch raged.

James almost laughed. Harry Potter had seen this reaction before when fans realized their mythical Harry Potter did not really exist.

Christina glared at James. "You are not him! And I will prove it!" The Dark Witch suddenly turned her wand in James's direction. In an instant, James and Thomas both had their wands up while Dumbledore and Grindelwald stood silently considering one another.

"We seem to be at an impasse," the Dark Lord dryly commented.

"You look like an imp's ass," Thomas shot back.

"Still the same Gryffindor, Thomas? How sad for Elizabeth."

A look of anger crossed Thomas's face that James had never seen on his grandfather before. "Elizabeth chose me, Albert. We were dating when you met her for Merlin's sake."

"Wait, Grindelwald went Dark because Elizabeth wouldn't leave you for him?" James asked in an incredulous voice. "What is it with Dark Lords needing a hug?"

For the first time since their arrival, the Dark Lord lost his temper. "SHUT UP!"

Grindelwald seemed to regain control after his brief outburst. He gestured and the oak table disappeared. "I believe this had gone on long enough. You are not welcome here. Leave now and live."

"Step away from my son, and we will be on our way."

"He is my apprentice and he remains here. I don't know what you tried to do to him but this is where he belongs. He will be the most gifted Dark Lord in history when he finishes his training."

"That is not acceptable, Albert," Dumbledore said in a serious voice. "My student comes with us."

The impasse would have continued if not for a disruption from outside the room. James recognized the sound of Claude's voice casting a number of spells. A deep bellowing roar answered his spells.

"Thomas, see what is happening," James told him.

Thomas had just turned to the door when Claude Delacouer's body flew through the doorway. James ducked as he saw the movement out of the corner of his eye. The French Auror's body landed in a bloody heap on the floor. From the vacant stare on his face, James knew it was already too late for his friend.

A huge, troll-like witch appeared in the doorway. Her hands were bloody as she clenched her wand tightly in her right hand. Her left arm hung limply at her side. "Leave now as Lord Grindelwald demands," she growled. Then she reached out to grab Thomas.

That started the fight. Thomas cast a Blasting Curse and knocked the witch back through the doorway. Then he followed her through the door.

James didn't have time to worry about his grandfather fighting the half-troll witch. As he ducked a dark purple curse cast by Christina. He ducked and rolled to the side. His second wand appeared in his left hand.

“Come on, Christina lets finish what we started at Hogwarts and Beauxbatons.”

The Dark Witch smiled. “It is you. Yes, the three Tri-Wizard schools. I always wanted to complete in that and never had a chance. We’ll have one of our own.”

James heard Grindelwald saying, “Come, Albus, let us take our discussion outside. I promise this will only take you out to the courtyard. I think we will need the room.” James wanted to turn and see what was happening but heard two pops as Portkeys took them away.

James made a holding gesture towards Christina. “One moment.” Christina paused with confusion on her face. James deliberately pointed his wand at Tom and cast Moblicorpus. Tom’s unconscious body was moved into an out of the way corner. Snuffles and Nagini moved next to their master to protect his slumber.

When James turned back to Christina, the Dark Witch had a smile on her face. They started to circle each other.

“I am glad you did that. I am really fond of the boy. He will make a superior Dark Lord.”

“That is supposed to make me feel good?” James asked absently.

Christina ignored his question. “I should have known you and the Count were the same person. Tom’s style is modeled too much on yours. I thought it was a natural gift, but now I know it was conscious on his part.”

James smirked at her, “Tom called you my ‘psycho fan-girl’.”

The witch frowned but her lips quirked. “Brat.” She seemed to start to say something else but slid directly into an attack mode.

ADAD

Tom woke up as he felt himself lifted off the floor and floated into the corner. He felt the warm, comforting presence of Snuffles leaning

against him. The familiar sensation of Nagini slithering around him added to his comfort. Tom needed that comfort as the memory of everything he did since arriving at this cursed school came back to him.

The sound of a curse exploding against the wall caused Tom to open his eyes. What he saw he would remember for the rest of his life.

Two silent Blasting Curses and a Bone-Breaking Hex passed through the space his father had just been occupying. Christina moved lightly on her feet in a constant motion as she dodged James's returning spells. A virtually silent whirlwind battle of spells and motion ensued. The only sound coming from the room was the sound of curses hitting the walls, footsteps and the breathing of the combatants.

Curses, hexes, charms and spells of all types flew through the air. Neither combatant could get the upper hand in the fight. Tom noticed the outside wall of the room was melting as the stone of the tower liquefied.

Tom had spent many hours training with both his father and Christina. He had flattered himself to think he was approaching their level of dueling skills. The display in front of him proved how wrong he was. Tom knew he was an extremely gifted wizard; much more advanced than his father in almost every field of magic. But what he saw here told him he would never reach the level of dueling mastery he was watching here today.

'No wonder he kicked Voldemort's arse.' Tom smirked to himself as he watched his father's preternaturally quick reflexes. 'I may end up a more powerful wizard than Dad, but as a duelist he is the best.'

Except he was watching Christina go toe to toe with his father and neither was giving an inch. It was the most fantastic display of magic he had ever seen.

Tom noticed his father was moving subtly closer to Christina. Never a direct approach but the distance was definitely closing. Then the fight suddenly seemed to end. Tom's heart stopped.

A Cutting Curse caught James on the right shoulder leaving a great rant in his Unspeakable Robe. James gasped in pain and dropped his left hand wand as a hand went instinctively to clench his injured shoulder. His right hand looked shaky as he tried to keep his right hand wand pointed at Christina.

Christina gave a delighted sound as she moved in to finish off her long-time rival. She stepped forward to cast a spell and finish the fight.

Her wand dropped to the ground as a foot of steel suddenly appeared in her side. The witch looked down at the jeweled hilt of the sword sheathed in her body. Christina looked up at James with confusion on her face.

An uninjured James rose to his feet as he let his Unspeakable robe drop to the ground. Another set of robes appeared beneath. Tom recognized the robes. They were the same Battle Robes improved by Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley and worn by Harry Potter to defeat Voldemort, they were now being worn to rescue Tom Evans.

“A trick?”

“I need to get Tom home to his mother,” James explained almost apologetically. Christina was a Dark Witch but not in the same manner as Bellatrix LeStrange. James grasped the Gryffindor sword and pulled it out. With the sword gone, blood poured quickly from the wound. She sank to the floor as blood loss weakened her.

“You’ve really improved since our first meeting at Hogwarts five years ago.” James observed idly even as he cursed her back.

James drew the sword back to strike. “I am sorry,” he muttered.

Tom’s weak voice stayed his hand. “Wait, Dad. Don’t do it.” Tom saw his dad glance over at him with a questioning look on his face. “Let her live. I just want to go home.”

James lowered the sword. “Are you sure?” After Tom nodded weakly, James turned back towards the witch slipping into shock on the floor. “Christina, take an Oath not attack me or mine again and I will allow you to live.”

Christina fumbled for her wand. James pushed it closer with the tip of his sword. She picked it up and said, "I swear on my life and magic that I will not attack the family of Tom Evans or assist in such an attack in anyway. So mote it be."

The Oath took the last of her energy and she passed out. Tom was pleased to see his dad pause to cast a healing charm on her sword wound. It would leave a nasty scar unless it was healed soon by a real Healer but it was better than dying.

Oath or no Oath, James took her wand and tossed it into a corner as he made his way over to Tom.

He crouched down in front of his son. "Are you okay, Tom?"

Tom gave a game smile. "Better than over the last couple months. But I want to sleep for a week."

James smiled in relief. "Can you change into your mongoose form?"

Tom nodded, "Yah, I think so."

"Do that and I'll carry you out of here."

ADAD

James placed the mongoose form of his son in his robe pocket. The poor boy was asleep again as soon as he changed his form. James had planned to transfigure Tom to make it easier to get him out, but allowing Tom to do it meant Tom could turn back if something went wrong.

He did transfigure Claude's body into a wooden block. James knew having the body would be a comfort for his widow. Merlin only knew how the issue with Maria would be resolved now.

James stepped into the hall with both wands at hand. The hallway was almost as destroyed as the room he just left. Fear suddenly sent a cold shot up James's spine. "Grandfather?" he called in an urgent tone. He repeated the call twice more. Aside the concern of losing his grandfather and friend, James was concerned about the impact on

the future. James Potter wasn't supposed to be born for another fifteen years or so. How could he be born if something happened to Thomas? James started searching with a feeling of dread. Snuffles, with Nagini riding atop, ran around the area sniffing.

A slight groan from Tom's former room led him to discover Thomas pinned under the remains of the bed. The body of the huge, half-troll witch lay on the floor nearby.

"Thomas?"

"That witch was tough." Thomas groaned. "If Claude hadn't already weakened her, I don't think I would have survived."

"Are you okay?"

"I can't move my leg. The bed collapsed when she fell on it. I think it's broken too."

James cast a quick diagnostic charm. "Yep, it's broken. I'll get you out of there and we can immobilize it until we get down to Maria." James moved the witch's body out of the way and banished the bed's remains. As he worked on his grandfather, James quipped, "This is what you get for going to bed with strange women, Thomas." Thomas's answering growl promised revenge for the comment.

"Did you get Tommy? Where's Albus?"

"Tom is fine. He changed into his mongoose form and is currently sleeping. Albus and Grindelwald took a Portkey somewhere else."

The last piece of news irritated the older Potter. "That stupid, old goat. What was he thinking?"

Thomas's rant may have continued but the tower suddenly shook as a great crash was heard outside. James gave Thomas a hand up and the two wizards with Tom's animal friends started back for the lift.

They stepped out of the magical lift field a couple moments later. Chaz Potter stood there waiting. Flitwick was not in sight.

“Did you get Tom?” Chaz asked in a concerned tone.

“Yes, he’s safe. Where is Filius?”

“He’s watching the fight between Albus and the Dark Lord. Malfoy’s going to recognize you without your cloak on.”

James turned to Chaz. “Here, take Thomas down to Maria. Snuffles, go with them. Tell Charlie and Malfoy to pull back with you. If we haven’t seen any reinforcements already, I doubt they sent for them. I’ll get Filius and Albus.”

James moved out into the entry hall as the others started back to the staircase. He opened the main door only to hear Flitwick’s high pitched voice chirp, “Duck!”

James ducked back into the hall but nothing happened. He carefully stuck his head back out.

“Filius, what is going on out here?”

The Charms professor looked at him in surprise. “James? What are you doing here? How did you get here? Oh, never mind. You must see this! It is the most intense magic I have ever heard of!”

James stepped out and ducked behind a half-wall with Flitwick. When he looked up, he realized he had to agree with his old professor.

The courtyard looked like the remains of a bombing attack. Whole sections of the school’s wall had been blown out. None of the school’s statuary remained as anything but very small pieces of rubble. Oddly enough, one pine tree stood off to the side untouched while not one other plant remained.

The two combatants stood ten meters apart in the center of the yard. Neither made any attempt to dodge or use tactics. This was a flat out power struggle. No subtlety involved.

Sheets of black flame radiated from Grindelwald’s wand. The Darkness seemed to fill the yard in an unholy light. In places the

Darkness was not as intense; everything seemed to be colored with a disturbing red tinge.

Dumbledore answered this with a narrow beam of intense pure Light. The beam seemed to draw the Darkness into it. The inky red blackness roiled around the beam and crashed against it. The beam of Light stopped just short of the Dark Lord's wand tip. A small red and white maelstrom marked the end of the Light's reach. Sparks jumped from the maelstrom to strike out in random directions.

Both wizards were showing the strain of their prolonged duel. Albus's hair seemed to have changed from auburn with a bit of white to all white in just the time of the duel. Only his beard still had large hints of his original hair color. The previously urbane looking Dark Lord was having an even harder time. His hair was gone and his scalp seemed to be hardening up, forming ridges.

"The lighting is what has done all of the damage," Flitwick commented in an excited voice. "It has been most exciting!"

In spite of the situation, James chuckled absently, "Filius, you are the perfect Ravenclaw. Rowenna would have been proud of you." Suddenly, James realized what was bothering him. "Have you ever seen a demon?"

Flitwick started. "No, not many have. Demonology has been banned for centuries. Only a misguided few have attempted it in the last millennium." The diminutive genius shrugged, "Some Muggles play at it but they don't have the ability to actually open a portal."

"Yah, well I ran into a demon this guy's followers raised a year ago. Look at what is happening to his head."

Flitwick looked over the wall. "Oh my, the power he is channeling is altering his makeup due to the influx of magically negative elements within the magic's force. It will metamorphosis Grindelwald into a being of that plain of energy!"

"Couldn't you just say he's turning into a demon?" James muttered under his breath.

"I did," the Ravenclaw Head of House answered.

"Well, what happens when he changes?"

"I don't know," came the answer. "The negative aspects of delving into Demonology were never an area of interest to me."

The Dark Lord was starting to shake under the strain of the power output and the changes were growing more pronounced. James could swear he saw the nubs of wings under the wizard's robes.

"Albert, this cannot last much longer," Dumbledore suddenly called out. "You must desist from this action at once to save yourself! Please, don't do this! Don't make ME do this!" The note of pleading in the wizard's voice surprised James.

Grindelwald answered him in a voice that seemed raw and worn, but held a deep power to it. "I have come too far to turn back now!" The Dark Lord made a throwing motion and a ball of vile blackness flew directly towards Dumbledore.

The wizard merely batted it away like an irritating bug. James and Flitwick ducked as the black ball sailed over their heads and struck the Dark Lord's tower. The entire tower wavered for a moment and seemed to dissolve like so much smoke. In moments no sign it ever existed remained save for the hole in the roof of the school.

Dumbledore called out in a great voice, "This ends now, Albert!" The wizard seemed to push on his magic and the beam of Light closed the gap to the Dark Lord's wand. The maelstrom seemed to quiver a bit just off the tip of his wand but then, just for a moment, the beam entered Grindelwald's wand.

James would later need to watch what happened again on a special Pensieve to figure out what happened next. The Dark Lord and the air around him seemed to explode whilst a rift in the dimensional fabric opened behind him. Before the explosion could go anywhere the rift swallowed it up and sealed itself up. This happened in a single heartbeat.

Dumbledore collapsed to the ground as all trace of the Darkness disappeared. Sunlight suddenly filled the courtyard. James and Flitwick emerged from their shelter and made their way over to help their friend.

8 June 1944

The survivors of the strike team together with Maria and Tom collapsed in exhaustion in the underground lair that had been their base for the last several months. Dumbledore lay unconscious on a bunk with Tom resting on the couch. Snuffles and Nagini were curled up with him.

Charlie's body joined Claude's in a special case. The Unspeakable with Malfoy fought a demon slave of Grindelwald's. Surprisingly, Malfoy gave full credit for killing the creature to the Unspeakable. Chaz and Thomas found the wizard sitting next to her body and holding her hand. When asked about it later, Malfoy responded simply, "She was my cousin."

Maria was devastated with the loss of Claude. She held young Alan and rocked him gently as she cried. James tried to talk to her about returning with them but she did not seem to be listening.

Europe, in both the magical and Muggle worlds, was reacting like an knocked over anthill. The Muggle Germans were reeling from the successful Normandy landings. British, American, and Canadian forces were pushing hard for strategic footholds. The Muggle German commander, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, called '*Wüstenfuchs*' or 'the Desert Fox' had been on leave at the start of the landings with several of his key staffers. Failures in the chain of command increased the levels of German confusion.

The Dark Army was in no position to assist them like they would have in another situation. With the Dark Lord and Christina's disappearances coupled with the loss of several key leaders at the base of where the Dark Lord's tower once stood and the German magical government was in even more disarray than the Muggle one.

Albus finally woke on the afternoon of the 8th. He was magically weak but physically felt fine. Seeing his Transfiguration professor was

recovering, Tom turned to his father and asked, "Can we go home now?"

James reached over to hug his seventeen year old son. "That sounds good. Let's go home."

A/N: Next chapter: Tom returns home and the question of the Time Turner is answered. We're almost to the end!

Special thanks to Dellacouer for her excellent beta skills and lightning response!

Chapter 38 – Returning Home

13 June 1944 – Hogsmeade

The dawn light was just cracking the eastern horizon as two wizards with a large black dog appeared on the edge of the village. No one in the village was awake to notice their arrival. Since word of Grindelwald's defeat at the hands of Hogwarts's own Professor Dumbledore, the British wizarding population, along with their foreign guests, had been celebrating for the last five days. The celebration culminated last night with a village wide party with free firewhiskey and butterbeer paid for by the village's businesses.

The two wizards walked silently through the streets of the village whilst the dog ran from place to place happily investigating everything. Neither wizard called the dog back, but seemed to enjoy the calm walk. They came to a stop in front of a neat house with no lights coming from the inside.

The taller of the two wizards spoke first, "I'm feeling really nervous right now, Dad."

"They are your family, Tom. They won't care what you were made to do under the effects of the potion. They will just be excited you are home," the shorter wizard replied.

"But the potion only made me do what I wanted to do in the first place!"

James sighed in exasperation. "Yes, Dr. Jekyll. You met your dark side. You will be stronger now in fighting it because you know exactly where it would lead you. Now, can we go inside? The Ministry's tea is horrible and I want a good cup."

Tom smiled slightly at his father's tone and comments. Whatever reservations Tom himself felt over the events of the last year, his father made it clear he had none whatsoever. Tom knew his father felt he was worrying about this too much, but Tom knew how deep the Darkness inside him went and it scared him.

James opened the door and led the way into the house. The house had not changed in their absence. Tom in particular was struck by an odd sense that the last year was all a dream. With all that had happened shouldn't something have changed here?

"TOMMY!"

Tom was struck by a high-velocity missile that wrapped herself around Tom's legs and squeezed. A missile named Katie.

"TOMMY, YOU CAME BACK! I KNEW YOU WOULD! DID YOU MISS US?"

Tom bent over to hug his little sister. "Of course, I did, squirt. I had to come back just to see you." Katie giggled and hugged him back.

Their reunion was interrupted as a voice came from down the hall. "Katherine Elizabeth Evans, stop making all of that noise! You know no one got to sleep last night because of that party. I know I..." Katie's admonishment from her mother came to an abrupt halt. "TOMMY!"

Sarah ran to her eldest son and wrapped him in a great big hug. "You are home and you are safe! Oh, I missed you!"

James looked down at Snuffles and commented, "It is nice to be wanted." Then Katie noticed the large black dog and wrapped her arms around him. "Snuffles!" The dog's look back at James was priceless.

Sarah finally let go of Tom enough to notice her husband standing there. "James, you brought him home." She greeted him with a kiss as she hugged him.

The noise had awoken the rest of the house. The four year olds, Ron and Tia, came running into the room trailed by seven year old Michael. The room was filled with shouts and laughter as the Evans family celebrated all being together for the first time in over a year. Cillie arrived and excitedly started making breakfast for 'Master Tom'.

James saw very little of Tom for the rest of the day. Katie and Michael insisted he went flying with them on their new brooms. (Faster with a thirty foot height limit) Then Tia insisted he read to her and Ron. The smile never left Tom's face the whole day. After all, they were the reason he was able to break his dark side's grasp on him. You never know when he might need more memories to help.

Thomas and Elizabeth Potter arrived in the evening with Chaz Potter's family. Their son, Albert, soon joined with his Evans cousins in a number of games in and around the house. The impromptu party ran late into the night after the little ones were long asleep.

As he lay in bed falling asleep that night, Tom realized his father was right about the family's reaction and acceptance.

ADAD

Later that night, Thomas, Albus, and James sat in the back garden with glasses of butterbeer in the cool night air. The children were long in bed while Elizabeth and Sarah were talking inside.

"How bad was the Ministry?" Thomas asked.

James shrugged. "They wanted to perform a number of tests on Tom 'to ensure he would not relapse into Darkness'. Stupid bureaucrats, treating my son like a potions experiment gone wrong is not the way to handle this."

"So, what are your plans now?" Albus asked in a quiet voice.

"The Count has gone on an indefinite leave of absence. Nott wants to do a public award ceremony for Albus and the rest of us. It looks like Grindelwald's remaining leadership is too busy fighting each other to really bother us."

James looked like he remembered something. "We heard from Maria. She went and talked to Claude's widow. Apparently she was very understanding. She didn't want Maria or Alan around her but she did arrange for Maria to be hidden by the veela population in Bulgaria. So Maria and Alan should be safe."

"I am glad to hear Maria and Alan are safe. I know Claude was nervous about them ever meeting. I heard about the award thing and I know the Ministry is planning on sending teams to remove the remaining Dark Army forces, but what are you planning on doing?" Thomas asked again.

James sighed. "Sarah and the kids need me here. Tom is going to have a difficult time going back to Hogwarts. Not academically, but fitting back into normal life. Young Nott is supposed to Floo over. I'll get a better idea after they get together." James was silent for a moment. "My magic is due to vanish sometime in the next year or two. I was scared it would leave before we got Tom back. I have been thinking about attending a Muggle medical school and working with Sarah to combine magical and Muggle healing methods."

Thomas nodded. "That sounds like an interesting plan. And you still have your work with the Phoenix Foundation. Once all of the foreign students return home what are you going to do with the school in Wales?"

"The magical orphanage will remain there. It will be better for the students then to remain in the middle of London. Albus and I talked about turning it into a finishing school for post-NEWT studies." James paused, "How are you doing, Albus?"

The now white haired wizard looked down at the grass. Since the battle with Grindelwald, Albus had seemed withdrawn and fragile. After waking from his magical exhaustion sleep, the powerful wizard was very emotional and prone to quietly cry for reasons he would not discuss.

"James, you saw the end of my battle with Albert. Did you see what was happening to him?"

"He seemed to be turning into a demon, like the one I fought in Hamburg," James replied.

"He was drawing on the negative energies of that place to fuel his magic. I had to use positive energies to counter his. His magic was too strong for mine to pierce, but I could hold him back. He drew on more Dark magic than a human body can handle and it started to

change him.” Albus drew a deep, shuddering breath. “Once he changed enough, I was able to push him through the rift into Hell.”

Albus looked up at his two friends with a stricken face. “I did not just kill my old friend. I destroyed his soul. The demonic magic started it and I finished it when I pushed him through. The tattered remains will never know rest, only eternal torment.”

And then Albus Dumbledore did something James had never seen before either now or in the future he came from. The man hailed as the ‘Most Powerful Wizard Alive’ sank down in his chair and started to cry uncontrollably.

James and Thomas tried to settle their friend but after fifteen minutes of failure, James left saying, “This may be more serious than it looks. I want Sarah to check him out. He told the Healers at the Ministry he was over his magical exhaustion, but this looks like more than that.”

Sarah took one look at Dumbledore and ordered him to bed in their guest room. She ran a few diagnostic charms and whispered a few comments to Elizabeth, who left immediately afterwards. Sarah gave Dumbledore a Calming Drought and told him to rest.

The Healer in Sarah emerged when the old wizard tried to protest. “Albus Dumbledore, you need to rest and recover from your ordeal. Now you lay down, rest, and I don’t want to hear another word out of you.”

“Tyrant” Dumbledore muttered.

“I heard that, Albus! I said not one word!”

Outside the room, James winced at the interchange. He turned to his grandfather and commented, “She may be a full Healer now, but Sarah will always be a Medi-witch at heart.”

Thomas smiled back. “If Albus thinks this is bad now, wait till Elizabeth gets back with the Mind Healer from St. Mungos.” Elizabeth had told the two men that Sarah wanted her to Floo the hospital and ask for the on-duty Mind Healer to come at once.

“Thomas, you and James may leave now unless you have something to do that would help the situation?”

James and Thomas turned see Elizabeth entering the room trailed by the Mind Healer.

“No, dear. We were just leaving.” Thomas motioned to James as they escaped back to James’s library.

The Mind Healer spent the next several hours running tests on the sleeping Dumbledore. The combination of the Calming Drought, sleep and his weakened magical state allowed the Healer to slip past Dumbledore’s Occlumency shields.

The results were not too promising. “He is holding his mind together solely through will power and his Occlumency skills,” Healer Milfkin told them. “The backlash of magic from his fight with the Dark Lord would have shattered a weaker mind. He will need time and rest combined with treatment to make a mostly full recovery.”

This alarmed all of them.

James asked, “What would have happened if we didn’t catch this?”

The Mind Healer shrugged. “In any other case, I’d say the patient would lose all contact with reality. I was a First year when Professor Dumbledore started teaching. I think he is strong enough that eventually he could have recovered quite a bit on his own. He would have been functional but his own hopes and desires would have colored his judgment to an unhealthy degree.” She shrugged. “Given there would be no obvious signs and only a deep mental scan would have revealed it, most people would have called him eccentric or a little crazy.”

“Thank you.” James said absently whilst he thought about the Headmaster Dumbledore he knew as a student. The signs were all there. Could this have not been caught the first time around? Could the hidden injuries from his fight with Grindelwald on top of the type of magic used to counter the Dark Lord’s power, have been behind the odd decisions Albus made to leave Harry at the Dursleys, accept Snape’s treatment of non-Slytherin students, and his conduct of the

fight against Voldemort? It certainly seemed more likely than not at this point.

Whilst James was considering the ramifications missing Dumbledore's injuries would have caused, the others decided to relocate him to the Potter's for the summer.

"It will be very quiet and restful. I don't think the same thing could be said if he stayed here with the little ones around," Elizabeth stated.

Neither James nor Sarah disagreed with her comment. James muttered, "She means 'little hellions'." Which earned him a swat from his wife.

ADAD

When he awoke the next morning, Albus found himself in a familiar bed at the Potter Mansion with a number of his personal items and Fawkes sleeping on his normal stand beside Albus's bed. The professor sighed. He recognized the combined handiwork of Elizabeth and Sarah and knew resistance was futile. Potter women were a force of nature. Albus (wisely) rolled back over to get some more sleep.

14 June 1944 – Hogsmeade

Tom was excited when he saw the flames turn green. The figure that stepped out was a very familiar one but slightly different from the last time he had seen him. He looked a lot older.

"Tom!" the new arrival called out excitedly. The two best mates gave a brief (but masculine) hug in their excitement. Nott backed up but kept his arms on his mate's shoulder as he took all the changes in.

"Hogwarts was definitely not the same without you. It is so good to have you back. It was hard to run the school without my sidekick on hand."

Tom laughed at Nott's comments. After a year with no friends or companions it was nice to have his friend back.

"I thought you were my sidekick?" Tom retorted. "After all, I hear I left a follower behind."

Nott smirked, "You mean Peeves? The Bloody Baron is the only one that can control him and that is just because of he represents your House. He pranks all of us, especially the First years of all the Houses."

"Dad thinks that Tweaky's sprit is still trying to help the house-elves by giving them work to do," Tom told his friend.

"Well it is working," Nott replied. "He hasn't pranked anyone in our circle of friends though."

"How is everyone since I left? I heard about Xurana's leaving. What is everyone else up to? I owed Mary just before you came. I'm hoping she can come visit."

Nott looked a bit uncomfortable now. "Why don't we go see if we can steal some of your mum's biscuits? I really missed those more than you."

Tom felt a nasty suspicion as his friend tried to change the subject. Nott caught the look and realized his attempt failed.

He sighed. "Let's get your mum's biscuits and I'll tell you everything."

In an all too short a time for Nott, the pair were seated in the back garden. In fact, Tom was sitting in the same spot Dumbledore sat the previous night. They ate the biscuits for a bit before Nott started talking.

"After you were taken, the school was a mess. Fortunately the word of your capture didn't come out until after OWLS were done. Everyone was in shock on the Express ride home. Mary and the other girls were a wreck."

Nott paused to take another bite. "The rumors of why you were taken ran all over. Even the Daily Prophet printed up a bunch of theories. My father was keeping me quietly informed but there was not a lot of

information. Laura told me that Mary and the other girls kept getting together all summer.” Nott shrugged. “It was not a fun summer.”

“For me either,” Tom added.

Nott nodded his agreement and continued. “When we got back to school the news came out that Grindelwald introduced you as his apprentice. After the rumors last year about you going Dark, too many of the students were willing to believe you joined him willingly.”

“And Mary was one of them,” Tom finished when Nott paused.

“I don’t think she really thought you went Dark willingly,” Nott inserted quickly. “But she announced her intent to move on. I’ll admit it was nice to have her start smiling and acting normal again. She started dating again at Halloween. She got engaged at the end of the school year.” The last was said in a rush.

Tom felt like he had just been punched in the stomach. “Who is she with? Rosier?”

Err, no, Evan is seeing Alicia. Pretty serious about it too.” Nott’s voice dropped down to almost a whisper. “She’s with Sardonnnes.”

“Alajos?” Tom asked in surprise.

Nott smirked slightly, “Well, not Andrea.”

“What would she see in a git like him?”

“He did grow up a bit after you kicked his arse.” Nott answered. “I...” Nott paused when he noticed a red glint in Tom’s blue eyes.

Why are you so angry? Nagini hissed as he slithered into the garden.

My mate has left me whilst I was held captive by the Dark Lord. Tom hissed back angrily.

The cold blooded creature considered Tom dispassionately for a moment. *Then she was not worthy of you. Find another mate who is worthy.*

Tom glared at his familiar. *Shouldn't I fight to get her back?*

If a snake had shoulders, Nagini would have shrugged. *It is not important that she has found another to fertilize her eggs, but that she lost faith and surrendered you to the Dark.*

Despite himself, Tom laughed at the snake's cold, emotionless assessment. The red light in Tom's eyes receded to Nott's relief.

"Nagini makes a good point," Tom commented to Nott.

Nott smirked when Tom relayed the snake's comments. "I always said both of your familiars were smarter than you." He paused. "It bothered me when they started dating. We had a huge blowout over it. I told her Sardonnes was stealing her from you to make himself look better. We almost had a full out duel in the common room."

"What happened?"

Nott looked a little embarrassed. "Laura hit me in the back with a Stunner. When I calmed down she convinced me it was none of my business who Mary dated. I still think I was right about why he chased after her, but Andrea says he fought with her uncle over getting engaged to an English witch, even if she is a Pureblood."

Nagini climbed up Tom's chair and hissed in his ear. Tom nodded and muttered, "I think you are right."

"What did he say?" Nott asked.

"If Mary breaks it off and comes back on her own, then we might have a chance. I plan on revealing my true heritage and why I was taken when school starts. If she tries to come back then, I should run the other way no matter what I feel. If she stays with him, I should just try to be happy for them both."

Nott snorted. "I knew there was a reason Slytherin liked snakes."

4 July 1944 – Potter Mansion

The Potter Clan was having a large celebration at the Potter Mansion to officially celebrate Tom's return. Unofficially they were also celebrating James's retirement from the Department of Mysteries. The only non-Potter family member in attendance was Professor Dumbledore who was still a guest of the elder Potters.

Several hours after the party started, James and Tom snuck away to Thomas's study. Once the door closed a pair of voices greeted them.

"Welcome back, boys!" "It is nice to see my heir back safely."

"Hello, Salazar, Godric," Tom greeted them. "I almost didn't ever expect to see you again."

"Indeed, we feared the same," Slytherin's portrait answered. Salazar turned and bowed slightly in James's direction. "On behalf of the Slytherin family I thank you for ending the curse on my family forever."

"You mean I don't have to worry about turning Dark again?" Tom asked excitedly.

"I am afraid not, young Tom," Godric answered. "The curse on the Slytherin line merely allowed the Darkness we all carry inside to take control of them. The potions Thomas told us of acted to speed up the curse. Your act of will coupled with your father's enabled you to suppress the Darkness and snapping the curse."

"Your children will not be forced to endure the curse driving them to Darkness, but like any witch or wizard, they may choose to give into it on their own," Salazar finished.

Tom frowned at their answer. "I'd hoped I wouldn't have to worry about it anymore."

Salazar snorted. "Everyone with any type of power will always have to deal with the temptation to misuse it. I am sure your father and Thomas would tell you the same thing. Now that the curse is broken, I want to talk to you about restoring our family's heritage."

Godric interrupted, "But first I want to hear about the battle. Thomas has already told us about the little he saw."

Tom felt a bit reluctant but he complied with the painting's request. He spent the next twenty minutes describing all he had seen during the battle.

"Why did you allow the Dark Witch who captured you to live?" Salazar asked.

A frustrated look crossed Tom's face. How would he explain this? "Christina is Dark, but not really evil. Yes, she used Dark curses and served a demon summoning master who would have sent us all to Hell, but I think she just wanted the challenge. I saw her a lot last year and she and Helena were really the closest things I had to friends there. Does that make sense?"

Surprisingly it was Godric who voiced his agreement. "Remember Erik, that Viking chieftain that tried to invade Hogwarts for his king? I liked him but he would have killed us all because his king ordered it. Even you like him and that was after the accident." Godric smiled at Tom and winked. "Mercy to a defeated enemy is a Gryffindor trait. Maybe the Potters have rubbed off on you."

Godric and James laughed as Salazar and Tom made protests of indignation.

Once the protests wound down, Godric asked, "What about Black?"

James frowned. "Thomas told me the news just before we came in. The short answer is nothing." James held up a hand before Tom could yell. "The only surviving witness to Black's treason is Tom. No other evidence exists so the Minister refused to bring charges. Since Veritserum is not yet accepted as fool-proof by the Ministry its use is not allowed in legal proceedings. Plus the fact he is a Wizengamot member and they would not be likely to convict one of their own members without solid proof."

Salazar was nodding, "I understand the Minister's position. And what does your former Department think?"

James gave him a predatory grin. "Mr. Able assures me that they will be watching him for any signs of criminal activities. Moody took offense to Black's getting away with it and has spun up the Aurors to watch him too. Politically, Black has lost all of his influence with the Government and the Minister removed him from all of the committees he was a member."

"Did we find out what role Orion played in this?" Tom asked.

"From what we can tell, he just passed some school gossip on to his father and did a few odd tasks for him." James shrugged. "As far as the Aurors can tell, he was innocent of any knowledge of his father's activities."

"Good," Tom said. "School is going to be hard enough without having to deal with a traitor living in my own House."

1 September 1944 – Hogwarts Express

Tom pushed the cart with his trunk on it through the barrier onto Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. All four of his siblings were bouncing around excitedly at the sight of the train. Although he was feeling very nervous, he had to smile at the excitement of the little ones.

"Why do we need to wait?" Katie asked in a very loud voice. "I already read all of Tommy's old First year books!"

"You can't go until your core grows up a bit," Sarah answered absently. "And you shouldn't be reading those books yet. They are too advanced for you."

"But mum," Michael protested, "Tommy says he read those books when he was our age!"

Tom gave his brother a mock glare. "That's the last time I tell you a secret!"

This caused Katie to throw her arms around Tom's leg and look up at him with innocent eyes. "Don't say that, Tommy! We love studying like you!"

“Oh, you are going Slytherin for sure,” Tom replied to her sweet, innocent look.

In all honesty, his younger brothers and sisters and Nott were the reasons Tom survived this summer. Mary answered his owl with a tearful letter apologizing for leaving him but that she had to move on. The next day, the Daily Prophet started publishing a series of accounts of Tom’s captivity and rescue. Not much of the truth made it into the paper. No one talked to the James or Tom for the story. In fact, the only member of the rescue team who was quoted was Abraxus Malfoy and he only said he and an unnamed Unspeakable fought against a demon.

The articles hinted the potions made Tom unbalanced and a danger to be around. They talked about his half-blood status and said the presence of Muggle-blood allowed the demons to enter Tom’s mind. (No mention was made of the fact that Grindelwald was a Pureblood from England.)

The articles did make Albus Dumbledore a national hero. They published a fantastic blow-by-blow account of a great magical duel complete with fantastic acrobatic moves, mysterious magic, and heroic nobility on Dumbledore’s part. Only brief mention was made of Claude or Charlie’s deaths or the input of the rest of the assault team. A couple lines covered the Count’s fight with Christina.

The British wizarding world reacted in what his father called their typical sheep fashion. The villagers of Hogsmeade started to avoid Tom when he walked through the village. Tom did not hear anything directly from his friends except Nott. Nott passed messages to him from Evan, Andrea, Laura, Ela, Janek, and the others. Their families or guardians were preventing them from visiting “until his mental state settled”.

Tom spent the time visiting the Potters and spending time with his family. He also reviewed all of the Sixth year material Hogwarts material not covered at Durmstrang. This included relearning not to use Dark curses in his dueling.

Tom wanted to skip the train and just walk up to the school, but dad insisted Tom take the train. He said the only way to face this was

straight ahead. Tom tried to argue that was a Gryffindor trait, not Slytherin, but his father remained adamant. So after saying goodbye to his mum and sibs, he slipped onto the train virtually unnoticed.

Nott and Tom had agreed to meet in the rearmost car of the train. To Tom's surprise, the car was already occupied with five of his friends, Nott, Laura, Ela, Janek, and Andrea. The car was done up with decorations.

Janek was the first one to notice his arrival. "Tom, welcome back!" The Polish student gave him a huge hug and pounded him on the back. Once he released Tom, the girls dove on him in a competition to squeeze the life out of him. Tom collapsed under the sheer weight that pounced on him.

"Girls, let him breath!" Nott laughed. "Come on you lot, let him up before you kill him!"

When the girls climbed off him, Tom had a silly grin on his face. He glanced up at Nott and muttered, "But what a way to go."

This caused the girls to laugh and broke the ice. A minute later Tom was sitting with a piece of cake and a glass of butterbeer. The girls were all filling Tom in on all of the events of the last year with the boys throwing in their own sarcastic additions.

The train had moved out of the station and was well on the way to Hogwarts when the first uncomfortable situation occurred. The compartment door opened to reveal Alajos Sardannes. The entire car turned to see who had entered and froze. Tom noticed the other boy wore the Head Boy's Badge.

"So you actually came back," the new arrival sneered. "I wouldn't have thought you'd have had the courage, traitor. You turned Dark at your first chance!"

Tom turned calmly to Nott and said, "I thought you said this git grew up. Sounds like the same arsehole he was before."

Sardonnes face turned red at that comment. "And stay away from Mary. She is mine now. We are going to be married right after we leave school in the spring."

Tom stood up to face the other Seventh year. He answered in a deadly calm voice. It was the same voice he used all of the last year at Durmstrang. "I sent Mary one letter before I knew about your relationship. Once I learned about it, I stopped. Now, if you really think I am Dark, why are you making me your enemy?"

Sardonnes paled at the perceived threat in that question, but he held his ground. "I am Head Boy now and I'll be watching you. One foot out of line and I'll..."

The calm voice interrupted him. "Go away now, Sardonnes. Who Mary chooses to spend her time with is up to her. So take your insecurities and leave. We were having a party here."

Andrea stood up and placed a hand on Tom's shoulder. "Alajos, there was no trouble here until you started it. Please don't make things harder than they have to be."

Sardonnes snorted without looking at his cousin and stormed out of the car.

The half-Veela French witch apologized to Tom. "I am sorry, Tom. Ever since word came of your rescue, Alajos has been scared Mary would leave him for you. I think part of the reason he has hated you so much is he has always been attracted to her."

Tom smiled sadly at his friend. "It's okay. I can handle it. I don't think I would be very good in a relationship right now anyway."

"Enough serious stuff, let's get back to the party!" Janek announced.

The party did resume, but without the same level of excitement as before.

ADAD

It was not until the Express reached Hogsmeade Station that Tom had his first glimpse of Mary. She gave him a sad, little wave from inside a carriage Alajos and his friends were climbing in with her as Tom and his friends moved past. He felt an odd pull as he waved back with a valiant attempt at a smile.

Despite the attempts of his friends to lighten his spirits, Tom remained quiet the whole ride up to the school. He followed the crowd to the Great Hall without really looking around. He didn't seem to notice the odd glances and muttering of the students around him.

A cream pie broke Tom out of his funk. More specifically, a flying cream pie that landed squarely on his head.

Tom wiped the pie's remains from his eyes and reached for his wand as rage bubbled just under the surface. His eyes darted around for Sardonnes.

Instead of his school rival, Tom found himself eye to eye with the school's new poltergeist. "Ooh, Tommy-boy! You come back to ol' Peevsie! Now I can have so much fun!" The poltergeist wrapped his arms around Tom and then quickly let go and popped up over Tom's head. "Look out Fistsies! Heeeeeeeeres Peeves!"

Tom turned to watch the disappearing poltergeist in disbelief. Dad and Professor Dumbledore had told him what happened to Tweaky but this was his first encounter with the ghost of his friend.

"Tom? Are you okay?" Rosier asked in a cautious tone.

To the shock of the students around him, Tom started laughing deep belly laughs. He ended up holding his sides from laughing. The students around him looked on in surprise. Many had seen the rage in Tom's eyes. This was the last reaction they expected.

When he regained control of himself, Tom wiped the tears from his eyes and turned back to his friends. "Let's get into dinner. I am suddenly very hungry."

The still silent student body watched Tom and his friends walk into the school accompanied by Tom's snickers.

ADAD

The Great Hall quickly filled in behind Tom and his friends. Traditionally the Seventh years sat at the end of the table furthest from the staff table. Tom took the very end seat as his friends settled in around him. Andrea and Janek moved off to their own House's table. Mary and the remaining Slytherin Seventh years settled just down the table from Tom.

Mary sat on the same side of the table as Tom but they were separated by Nott, Laura and Alicia. Tom actually felt slightly relieved. He knew they would have to talk eventually, but in front of the rest of the students in the Great Hall was not a good idea.

Tom enjoyed watching the Sorting although he was surprised how short they all were. He grinned at the thought of Katie and Michael's arrival at Hogwarts. Katie was definitely Slytherin but Michael was Gryffindor to his toes. Watching Quidditch should be exciting when they both went out for their House teams.

Professor Dippet stood after the Sorting and gestured for silence. "Welcome to another year of magical learning at Hogwarts. I am Professor Dippet. Before for we start with our feast, I would like to say a few words. We welcome back two of Hogwart's own after defeating the Dark Lord Grindelwald."

The Headmaster gestured at Dumbledore to rise. "Our own Professor Dumbledore single-handedly battled the Dark Lord and brought his evil reign over the Continent to an end. He received the Order of Merlin, First Class just last week at a ceremony at the Ministry of Magic. Welcome back Professor Dumbledore and well done!"

The Great Hall erupted in cheering for the Transfiguration professor. Dumbledore was already popular with the students, but his defeat of the Dark Lord raised his position to mythical proportions. The foreign students, chased out of their homeland by the Dark Army, saw him as the savior of their nations. His victory meant they would one day be able to go home.

Tom watched the older wizard with some concern. Dumbledore waved back with a small smile on his face, but Tom knew how hard

the professor had worked over the summer to recover from the cost of his victory. (Tom wasn't supposed to know but he wasn't a Slytherin for nothing.)

After the cheering quieted down, Dippet called out, "We also welcome back our student, Tom Evans, forcibly taken from us for over a year. Now he has returned to finish his education with us."

Silence filled the Hall. Then Professor Dumbledore stood and started clapping. He was followed by Professor Flitwick and Tom's friends. The rest of the Hall started to clap half heartedly. Tom smiled when a particularly large Gryffindor Fifth year rose and clapped with a smile on his face.

Tom rose from his seat and walked to the front of the Great Hall. The clapping came to a stop as he reached the staff table.

"Would you like to address the school, Tom?" Dippet asked.

"Yes, sir"

The Headmaster motioned for Tom to do so as he settled back into his chair. Tom turned to face the assembled school.

"The Daily Prophet has published a great deal of tripe about what happened to me over the last year and why I was taken in the first place. I have never talked to a single reporter and neither has my father nor has Professors Flitwick or Dumbledore done so."

"I am going to deal with the second question tonight. Why was I taken? I was born Tom Malvolo Riddle. My mother was born in the Gaunt family. Mofitin Gaunt married the only daughter of Salazar Slytherin. I am the only surviving member of the Slytherin line. I am the Heir of Slytherin."

A loud murmuring erupted from the students at Tom's pronouncement.

"Grindelwald wanted something of the Founder's that he left in the school. Since legend said only Slytherin's Heir could retrieve it, I was targeted by the Dark Lord." The murmuring increased at that

comment. "The object in question was destroyed by an Unspeakable from the Department of Mysteries."

"My family has hidden for too long because of the Darkness tied to the Slytherin name. It is time that ended and we came openly into the Light. I am proud of Slytherin's accomplishments before the Darkness infected him. I am making it my mission to balance the good he accomplished whilst remembering the dangers of slipping into the Darkness. Thank you."

The Hall was silent as Tom made his way back to his seat. Once he sat down, Dumbledore and Flitwick once again stood up and clapped. The Hall was so stunned no one joined them.

ADAD

"Bloody hell, mate! What did you do that for?"

Tom smirked a bit as Nott erupted the moment they entered the Slytherin Common Room. When he sat down after his announcement, Tom had told his friends they would discuss it once they were back in their Common Room. He'd seen Nott in particular struggling through dinner to contain himself. Tom found a grim amusement in watching the struggle.

Tom led the way into the Common Room and over to the couches they had traditionally claimed as their own. Tom dropped into a chair and looked up at the unmoving, non-magical portrait of Salazar Slytherin hanging over the fireplace. It must have been a trick of the firelight, but Tom could swear the thing just winked at him.

Whilst Tom was looking at the painting in shock, the Sixth and Seventh year Slytherins had filled the seats surrounding him. Many of the younger classes stood in loose groupings around them.

Tom was surprised to see Alajos Sardonnnes sitting next to Mary in a couch next to him. "What is he doing here?"

Mary gave Tom a half apologetic, half-pleading look. "He is the Head Boy and has as much right to be here as they do." She pointed to

where Andrea, Ela, and Janek were sitting. Then she added in a soft voice, "And I invited him here as Head Girl."

"What I had to say was for my House and my friends. Your fiancé is a member of neither group. How can you claim he has a right to hear what I want to say?" Tom asked in a flat, emotionless tone.

"Tom, please. Can you two learn to put this behind you?" For his part, Sardonnnes looked furious. Tom couldn't say if it was at Tom's comments or at his girlfriend's defensive tone.

"Are you sure you are in the right House, Mary? You sound more like a Hufflepuff than a Slytherin. Mr. Sardonnnes decided to pay me a visit on the train today. His actions don't give me any reason to 'put it behind me'. And why in Merlin's name, would you decided to do this in front of the entire House?"

Mary looked furious as she rose from her seat and pulled Alajos after her. "I had hoped you would be more mature than this Tom Evans. It appears I was wrong." Taking her boyfriend's hand, she led the way out of the Common Room.

Tom watched her go while Alajos glared back at him. He realized the whole scene had been staged by Mary to confirm she made the 'right' choice. Tom wondered if it was a conscious or unconscious effort on her part. He decided on conscious because it had been so different from the Mary he remembered.

A soft, French accented voice broke his thoughts. "Tom, are you okay?"

He smiled at the concern in Andrea's voice. "I'm fine."

For the next two hours Tom talked about what he had learned about the truth behind Salazar Slytherin's life and turn to Darkness. He explained about the accident and the curse it brought down on the Slytherin family. Without too many details he talked of his time at Durmstrang and his rescue. All of the listeners sat stunned at what they heard. Only Nott had ever heard most of this before.

He did not talk about the Gaunts and the details of his own early life or how he came to live with James Evans. Some things still needed to be kept private.

The Slytherin's were sworn on their House loyalty to only discuss what they heard with current or past members of their House. Tom knew realistically it would leak out eventually but he hoped to slow the rate down and keep it out of the Prophet for a bit.

Tom crawled into his bed that night. It was his first night sleeping in his dorm since his kidnapping. The room seemed smaller in an indescribable fashion. Snuffles and Nagini were already curled up on his bed when he arrived.

As he laid waiting for sleep, Tom thought about everything that had happened that day. He decided he probably should have handled it better, but couldn't think how with the emotions and memories he was dealing with.

Tom decided he wanted to focus on his studies and enjoying his final year at Hogwarts. He would have to get his Seeker position back from the Fourth year who played last year but that shouldn't be too difficult. The boy had only caught the Snitch once in the season.

Everything else would be sorted out in its own time.

9 June 1945 – Hogwarts

The war in Europe was drawing to a close. The collapse of Grindelwald's support did not affect the Muggle war as much as many had hoped. The death toll was a bit lower than it would have been otherwise, but enough of the Dark Army's forces remained active after their leader's death to continue to slow the Allied advance.

Two young looking wizards walked across the Hogwarts fields towards the Quidditch pitch. They had their brooms in hand and the taller of the two carried a picnic basket. The taller one looked slightly older but was in fact much younger. James was spending an unusual day without the appearance aging potions he normally used to look his chronological age.

James had visited a number of Muggle schools the previous day to look into his plan of becoming a Muggle doctor. A little judicious magic use placed the appropriate records in the system for one James Evans to have the correct grades for admission to a number of top universities. Tom found it odd to have his father looking his age but he understood the logic of using his natural appearance to fit in with the other students.

Unaware of Tom's thoughts, James asked, "Feel relieved to have your NEWTS out of the way?"

Tom nodded, "I guess so, I am just glad to be finished with the school year. But now I need to get a job and earn some Galleons. Homework doesn't sound so bad anymore."

The school year had been a uncomfortable one. After his revelation to the school, Tom became the de-facto Head Boy for the school. Sardonnnes had all the legal authority to enforce the rules, but all the students looked to Tom as the school's moral authority. Concerns of his being Dark faded as memories of his past friendly dealings with the other Houses returned.

Relations with Mary and Sardonnnes thawed a bit as the year passed. With the whole school watching their behavior, neither side wanted to act like a child. Mary was convinced however that Tom was behind the rash of pranks and Peeves targeting of Sardonnnes and his friends. (And she was right.)

James laughed at Tom's comment. "You can always go back to school. The Welsh School will be opening its doors come fall. One of the Oxford deans is a Muggle-born wizard. Between him and the PM we have arranged for Welsh School students to attend Oxford classes to round out their studies. A special Floo has already been arranged. There is a spot with your name on it if you want it."

"Dad, I don't want a spot just because I am your son! Those spots are hard to get..." Tom protested.

"Stop, Tom. You were the Head Boy this year and you set an all-time Hogwarts record for scores on your NEWTS. No one will doubt you earned this on your own merit."

“But, you have to apply and I didn’t!”

James grinned. “Your mother did it and submitted it.”

“What about the interviews?”

The grin grew larger. “All of the review board knows you and had no problem accepting you. Since most of them were your professors or the NEWT examiners it was easy.” After he paused, he added, “Unanimous too.”

Tom gave a weak laugh. “I am supposed to be an adult wizard. You shouldn’t be trying to run my life.”

James laughed unrepentantly. “It’s mostly your mother’s doing. It’s not my fault she still sees the cute little boy she first saw in a St. Mungo’s bed. So, really it is your fault.”

“You are impossible, Dad.” Tom growled.

“I know,” the accused happily agreed.

The pair had reached the pitch and James extracted a Snitch from a robe pocket. “Best out of five? Loser has to clean up after Snuffles without magic?”

What followed was an aerial display that would have made the English, Scottish, or Welsh National Teams green with envy. Both Seekers exhibited highly developed skills and tactics. James was smaller and faster with a natural’s sense of flying. Tom was larger and heavier so not as fast, but he used his size and a better sense of strategy to offset James.

The pair of Seekers flew for over two hours. James caught the first two Snitches. Tom got the next one. Now both Seekers were in pursuit of the fourth Snitch. Tom was trying to use his larger size to knock his father off course. James was dodging whilst weaving along the Snitch’s course.

James felt a slight shiver run up his spine as he felt magic building around him. A thrill of panic ran through his mind. Could this be the

Time turner pulling his magic away? James suddenly swerved and headed for the ground leaving a confused Tom behind.

Thirty feet above the ground, James blinked. A sudden roar filled his ears as the Snitch appeared in front of him. Instinctually he grabbed the small fluttering ball. The roaring increased causing him to glance up. The stands were filled with students in Hogwarts robes.

In his shock, James never noticed the Bludger heading straight for him. It collided with the side of his head knocking him from the broom and to the ground below. As he fell, he thought, 'Why me?' He was unconscious before he hit the ground.

ADAD

Tom brought his broom to a sudden stop as he stared at the spot his father had just been. The loud clap was not the normal sound of Apparition or a Port key. Tom paled as he realized what it meant.

He turned his broom for home as he tried to figure out how to tell his mum and siblings that dad had returned to his own time.

A/N: One last chapter to go.

This chapter is dedicated to Dellacouer for all of her efforts as a beta on this story. Her questions, comments and corrections have all been greatly appreciated.

Chapter 39 – Home Again

12 April 1997 - Hogwarts

He opened his eyes and looked at the ceiling. A brief glimpse told him exactly where he was: The Hogwarts Hospital Wing. And it was as he remembered it from his time in school, not from when he taught here.

He suppressed a groan as it hit him that the potion had not worked. He had not stayed in the past. The pounding on his head from the Bludgers impact was nothing to the emotional pain he was feeling.

“Hello, James,” a familiar voice greeted him. “Or, I guess I should say Harry now.”

Harry answered without opening his eyes. “What happened, Albus? I thought the potion would work. And why isn’t Madam Pomfrey shoving potions in my throat?”

“As to your first question, I have sent for young Tom to discuss that with you. As to the second, I am afraid I have ejected the hospital staff under protest until you recovered. Do you plan on opening your eyes?”

Harry opened his eyes and rolled over to look at the seated Dumbledore. Harry grinned slightly, “You’ve gotten old since I last saw you.”

Albus chuckled, “I dare say I have. It has been over fifty-two years since I have last seen you.”

The doors to the Hospital Wing opened to admit two figures. The sight caused Harry to groan, Fudge and ‘Weatherby’. Harry just plopped back onto his pillow.

“Is this the young man who disrupted the Quidditch match today?” Fudge asked. “That was a very important event you interrupted today! I will have you placed in Azkaban for this!”

“Oh, go to Hell, Fudge and take Weatherby with you,” Harry groaned.

Percy Weasley looked outraged. "How dare you speak to the Under-minister for Games and Sports in such a fashion?! I'll have you know..."

Harry's head shot up. "Under-minister? You're not the Minister?"

The question stopped Weasley's rant and causing both Ministry lackeys' eyes to bug out.

"No, I am not the Minister!" Fudge sputtered.

"That would be me."

Harry turned to see a tall, dark haired wizard with blue eyes enter the room. He looked about seventy and silver was just touching the temples of his brown hair. Harry pulled a long face.

"Tommy?" The wizard grinned and nodded.

"You're the Minister of Magic?" Again the nod.

Harry dropped his head back and let out a plaintive whine. "After all that Tommy, you still went Dark!" Fudge and Weatherby made noises of protest as Tom and Albus started to laugh.

Harry sat up to mock glare at the much older man who was his son. "You sent those two in here to wind me up, didn't you?"

Tom grinned, "Guilty as charged. Actually, I've been planning this for at least five years. I didn't expect you to arrive in the middle of a Quidditch match though. The look on your face was worth it!"

"Should have grounded you more," Harry grumped.

Tom stepped up to the bed and wrapped Harry in a big hug. "Merlin, it is great to see you again, Dad. We missed you!"

Harry felt tears start to form in his eyes. "What happened, Tom? Where is your mother?"

Tom pulled back and addressed Fudge and Percy. Their faces looked shocked over the small exchange they had just witnessed. "This

gentleman is an Unspeakable. Anything you heard or saw here is covered under the Magical Secrets Act. Thank you, gentlemen.” The pair knew a dismissal when they heard one. They left quickly without another word spoken.

Tom sat down in the seat next to Albus. “Dad, I have to tell you what happened. I...I am not sure how to say this. I thought of this moment for years but this is harder than I expected.”

“Where is your mother?” Harry asked in a soft voice.

“Mum died in 1963. She contracted a magic-resistant virus that destroyed her kidneys. We tried everything, magical and Muggle, but the cure didn’t exist then. We think the Muggles are close with some of their gene therapy theories but they are still ten years off. I’m so sorry, dad.”

Harry broke down and started crying. He had just seen his wife three hours ago and now he had been told she’d been dead for over thirty years. Tom just sat and held his hand.

“What about the others? Katie, Michael, Ron and Tia, what happened to them?”

“Thomas and Elizabeth took care of all of us. Ron and Tia had already graduated from the Phoenix Magical University and were working by then. Katie and Michael were well into their careers. I was already married by that time.”

Harry grasped onto that like a drowning man to a rope. “The kids... how are they? And who did you marry?”

Tom smiled gently, “I married Andrea. She waited until after we recovered from your disappearance and then forced me to attend Phoenix with her. Eventually she got tired of waiting and started to curse me until I would ask her out on a date. She claimed she was an embarrassment because it was the first time in veela history one of them had to force a man to pursue her.” Harry laughed as he heard this. He had no trouble imagining the scene.

“As for the others, they are all either here or on their way. You’ll see them soon. I wanted to give you time to adjust before you had to face a crowd.” Tom reached into a pocket and pulled out an envelope and handed it to his father. “Mum left this for you.”

Harry took the envelope in shaking hands and looked at it. It was addressed to Harry James Potter Evans. He carefully broke the seal and pulled out the letter.

My love-

I am so sorry that we did not have the rest of our lives to spend together. Even knowing you would eventually have to return to your own time, the emptiness of your leaving was impossible to fill.

The potion I gave you was really a disguised Calming Potion. My research indicated the real potion had too high a chance of causing your death. I couldn’t bare the thought of you dying just for the chance to stay with us as a Muggle.

I decided I would rather live for fifty years without you than to have you sacrifice every thing for us. My love, you have always sacrificed for others. This time, we had to sacrifice for you. I am sure the man I married would have done the same thing if our roles were reversed.

Fate has decided we are not to meet again in this life. No cure exists for my illness and I expect to be gone soon. I have had a good life with you and the children. All five of them have brought me such joy and pride. And even after nine years alone, you remain the center of my life.

Please do not grieve for me too long, my love. Enjoy our family and your descendents. You return to your time as a young man with vast experience. Enjoy our accomplishments and live. The other has been well and truly vanquished. Now you must live your life.

I will love you forever,

Sarah

PS: Find a good woman to love and take care of you or I will come back and haunt you until you do!

The letter's end had Harry chuckling through his tears. It sounded so much like Sarah to make that kind of threat. He actually believed she might find a way to follow through on it. Harry wiped his eyes again and tried to pull himself together. He noticed Albus had slipped out whilst he was reading the letter.

"Can I get out of this bed?"

Tom grinned, "The Healers said you had an unnaturally hard head and the minor concussion should be all cleared up by now."

Harry got out of bed with a snort. "That sounds like Madam Pomfrey. Wait, you said Healers, plural?" Harry realized he was still wearing the clothes he had worn playing Quidditch in 1945.

Tom turned to the door and called, "You can come in now!" When he turned back he muttered, "There may be a few people waiting to see you."

The first man through the door looked like a slightly younger version of Thomas. He was followed by two dark blond haired women and another slightly stocky man with the trademark Potter hair.

The younger looking of the two women pushed past and wrapped Harry in a hug. "Dad! I am so glad you are back!"

"Tia?" Harry asked uncertainly.

Harry spent the next hour with his five children sitting around him. It felt odd to be talking to witches and wizards in their sixties and seventies and realizing they were the same little children he'd kissed good night just last night.

Ron was the shortest and stockiest of the children. He was the Head Auror working for Madam Bones. He produced the first bomb shell of Harry's return.

"You married who?!"

“Bellatrix Black. She is one of our best Aurors. We twin boys. Both of them are currently at Hogwarts. Why?”

The question was waved away. “Err, it doesn’t matter. It was a different place.” Harry slumped back into his chair in shock. He noticed Katie subtly using her wand in the corner of his eye.

“You became a Healer?”

Katie grinned sheepishly at getting caught. “I was the Healer here after mum. I turned it over to Poppy when I became Head of Pediatric Healing at St. Mungos. I married Gideon Prewett. We have two grown children named Antony and Cleo.”

Tia laughed, “And I married Fabian Prewett. He only chased me because it seemed the thing to do at his brother’s wedding. He was a bit surprised when I didn’t throw him back.”

“Is Anne Prewett your mother in law?”

Tia and Katie looked surprised. “Yes, she was,” answered Katie.

“She was the first person I met when I traveled back in time. She sold me the house in Hogsmeade,” Harry said in a soft voice. He was stunned at all that was happening. His brain felt like it would explode.

“She never told us that,” Tia said looking surprised, unaware of her father’s shock.

Tom smirked at his little sister. “Dad never took down the Fidelius before he left, so she wouldn’t have remembered it ever existed. That was why we had to move out.”

“Oh, hush you.”

“You had to move out? Where did you go?” Harry asked anxiously.

Tia took Harry’s hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. “Grandmum insisted we move into the Potter Mansion with them. The story went out that you died of injuries from rescuing Tom. We officially became

known as the Potter-Evans family. The Evans part is usually dropped now.”

Harry squeezed Tia’s hand back. “You are married now?”

Tia smiled back gently, “Yes, Fabian and I have been married for thirty years now. We have a daughter named Melissa. She is a curse-breaker in Egypt with her cousin Bill. I am the lead researcher and librarian for the Phoenix Magical University James Evans Library.”

“She is always requesting more budget,” Michael observed.

Tia made a face at him but her eyes were laughing. “It is not my fault the administration is so stingy!” Tom, Katie and Ron laughed at Michael’s mock glower.

Harry soon learned Michael ran the Phoenix Foundation and served on the Wizengamot and the Hogwarts Board of Directors. He was also a widower with two grown boys. He had married Ela’s younger sister who had died when a potions experiment exploded.

The next couple hours passed very enjoyably for Harry. They moved out of the Hospital Wing and into a nearby guest quarters that were normally reserved for parents visiting sick or injured students. The Potter-Evans family talked long into the night about everything that had passed since James’s ‘disappearance.’

Harry learned he had reappeared in what would have been his Sixth year in the afternoon of Parents’ Weekend. The Weekend was an opportunity for students’ parents (particularly Muggle-born) to visit the school and learn about the world their children had entered. Harry had appeared in the Hufflepuff- Ravenclaw match and caught the Snitch.

“It took you fifty years, but you managed to win our bet!” Tom quipped.

“Is another me a student now?” Harry asked.

Tom snorted. “This is an argument that has a whole research section of the Department of Mysteries fighting on a regular basis. It is so bad I now take their wands before each meeting.”

“First of all, it appears Rowena Ravenclaw’s “River” theory has some validity to it. Everyone you mentioned to me by name was born and married who they were supposed to. Yes, that includes James and Lily.” Tom smirked. “Actually, I am his godfather.” The others laughed as Harry looked at his eldest in shock.

After Harry recovered, Tom continued. “Lily did get pregnant at just the right time. However, three months into the pregnancy the fetus disappeared. Not miscarried, disappeared. One group of researchers claims it was because your soul already existed. So, no, there is not another Harry Potter wandering around.”

“Has the Department decided if I altered the timeline or moved to a parallel universe?”

Michael laughed. “No, they are still arguing. They want to send a magical probe outside the space-time continuum to see if a split occurs at the point of your arrival in the 1930’s. They are working with some Muggle scientists on it. One tried to explain to me they can tell where we are on the continuum or which direction but not at the same time. Something about matter and subatomic theory. I was lost in about twenty seconds.”

Harry leaned forward in his chair. “Can I go back?”

The children looked uncomfortable at the question. “But Dad, you just got here!” Katie blurted out.

Harry looked at her with tears in his eyes. “I know sweetie, but I want to be with your mother and see you all grow up. Not pop in at the end.”

“We can’t send you back, dad,” Tom said quietly. Seeing the look in his father’s eyes Tom repeated, “Can’t, not won’t. We don’t have the time travel knowledge your Aberforth used to send you back. My theory is the knowledge used before was originally recovered from Grindelwald’s library. When his tower was destroyed, so was the knowledge.”

Michael looked sympathetically at his father. “I understand how you feel, dad. I felt that same way when I lost Karolina. But even if you

could go back, you have no way of saving mum from the virus. The Healers said she had it for years. She probably had it before you even met.”

“I could be with her,” Harry yelled back, frustration and grief mingled in his voice.

“I know, dad. She talked a lot about you before she died,” Katie said softly. “You would face the same issue of losing your magic or dying if you could go back. She told me you needed to live your life here and find your own destiny.”

Harry broke down in his eldest daughter’s arms; a daughter who was older than his biological mother in this time. His sons filed out quietly whilst his daughters remained behind. Katie later slipped him some Dreamless Sleep Potion and Tia moved him to his bed.

ADAD

Harry woke the next morning. He found a pair of Muggle jeans, a shirt and trainers sitting in a chair near his bed. Harry lay in the bed for a bit of time and tried to reconcile all that had happened; the sudden loss of his wife and his arrival here.

As he rose to dress, Harry decided to use his Occlumency skills to set aside his grief in front of the others. Today he would meet James and Lily Potter for the first time. He would also meet his own grandchildren. In addition, he would be seeing Sirius, Remus, and his other friends again. They would not remember him but it would still be good to see them again.

Harry stepped out of his room to find Tia and Tom sitting by the fire talking in hushed tones.

“Good morning,” Harry greeted them.

“Hi Dad, did you sleep well?” Tom asked.

Harry grinned at his youngest daughter. “I did after Tia and Katie slipped me a mickey.”

“Albus has set aside the staff conference room for a Potter family breakfast,” Tom told Harry. “It will just be us, our spouses and our children if we can round them up.”

“I think I was less nervous invading Durmstrang than going to this breakfast,” Harry admitted. “You’ve all grown up. Merlin, even my grandchildren will all look older than me!” Harry shook his head. “Will Thomas and Elizabeth be here?”

Tom and Tia looked surprised. “Grandfather died in 1980 and Grandmum in ’83,” Tia answered softly. “Grandfather had a stroke that caused major brain damage and removed his ability to use magic. He passed after three months. Grandmum held on a bit after then but she lost her spark after he was gone.”

A new wave of grief swept over Harry. Only serious reinforcement of his mental disciplines kept his emotions under control.

“They enjoyed the forty years they had after you knew them. Having James made them twenty years younger.” Tom grinned, “I had to work extra hard to keep James from becoming a spoilt brat.” Harry snorted at his comment. “Grandmum was disappointed when the almost-you disappeared but she did get to see the birth of your brother, Jimmy.”

Harry looked up in shock. “I have a brother?”

Tia giggled, “And a sister. Sally is a First year Ravenclaw and Jimmy is a Fifth year Gryffindor.”

Harry rubbed his head. “Okay, do you have any other surprises before my head implodes?”

Tom’s eyes twinkled mischievously. “Not for right now. We’ll save the rest for later.”

“Oh, thank you!” Harry groaned sarcastically. “Now I’ll have something to look forward to!” Tom and Tia laughed, and led Harry out of his guest quarters.

Harry was trailing along behind his children as they walked through the Hogwarts halls. The school seemed unchanged from his last visit. "Is my office still here?"

"I used it for a bit when I taught Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions in the 70's but Albus kept it sealed up otherwise because of the Chamber." Tom laughed. "Actually, I think he hopes to lure you back into teaching."

Harry nodded absently as his mind wondered on all he had been told. He casually stepped aside when a group of students heading to the Great Hall for breakfast passed them. He failed to notice when a particular student fell into step beside him.

"Hi Harry. I'm glad you're back."

The light, slightly distracted sounding voice broke Harry out of his thoughts. "Luna? Er, how are you doing?"

Luna smiled, "This time through has been much nicer than before. I don't think I am going to die soon at least. I do miss the DA. It is a little odd to see you walking the halls with the Dark Lord." Tom chuckled ahead of them.

Harry gave her an odd look. "You remember the DA?" he asked hesitantly.

"Of course I do. This time has been much calmer. I still used what you taught us. Our defense professor has been impressed but everyone else acts like they don't know who you are." Harry could only stare at the little blonde in disbelief.

"Luna, you are going to make us late for breakfast!" a voice called down the hall. Even after all this time away, Harry still recognized that voice. He turned to see a bushy brown-haired witch descending on them flanked by a certain red-haired witch and a Patil twin in Ravenclaw robes.

"I was just talking to Harry," Luna replied in a distracted voice.

Hermione ignored Harry's presence as she huffed, "Luna, I've told you before, there are no Snorkacks and Harry James Potter is not a real person! Now, let's get to breakfast before Ron eats it all. Again."

Harry ignored the looks he was getting from Ginny and Padma as he said, "But Snorkacks live on the eastern edge of Sweden. Everyone knows that."

Hermione whirled on Harry with an angry look in her eye. "Don't encourage her! Are you a new student here?"

The group had stopped walking at this point. Tia and Tom were standing discretely just within earshot. "Actually, I am an old student. I finished Hogwarts next year."

All of the girls except Luna looked confused by Harry's seemingly contradictory statement. "How can you have graduated in the future?" Hermione asked in a demanding tone. "And who are you?"

"You're the boy who appeared in the middle of the match yesterday and caught the Snitch. Are you related to the Potters? You look like the twins," Ginny commented.

"Oh, I am sorry. Hi, I'm Harry Potter." Hermione automatically accepted his hand as he introduced himself. Then she realized what he said.

"You are not Harry Potter! Stop playing games on poor Luna. Too many people make fun of her now as it is!"

Harry frowned at Luna. "Is that still happening?"

Luna shrugged. "You weren't here to stop it this time. It is not so bad. Hermione and the other Potters at school try to shield me but it is not like having the Boy-Who-Lived's protection."

Harry couldn't help but give the small witch a quick hug. "I am so glad you remember me, Luna. I'll make sure they stop again." Luna gave him a big smile.

"Are you really Harry Potter?" Padma asked.

“Yes, he is,” Tom said as he stepped up to the group.

“Minister Potter!” Ginny jumped. “We didn’t see you there!”

“Hi, Lord Voldemort,” Luna greeted him. “I still say you look much better with hair and a nose. I don’t care what Daddy says.”

“Luna!” Hermione paled with embarrassment at the comment.

Tom gave her a small bow. “Thank you, Ms Lovegood. I appreciate your approval. I must say I like it better too.” His eyes glanced mischievously at Hermione for a moment before looking at his father. “Mr. Potter, we are going to miss the start of breakfast if we don’t hurry up.” Hermione’s jaw dropped.

“Really Ms. Granger, a good researcher has to learn to accept when their theories have failed and develop new ones.” Tia had joined the group unnoticed until she spoke. Harry caught the mischievous gleam in his daughter’s eyes as she winked at her niece. Ginny grinned back at her aunt.

Harry’s eyes widen momentarily as he realized his daughter was his former girlfriend’s aunt. The thought stunned him for a moment as he felt a headache setting in.

“Madam Prewitt! What are you doing here?” Hermione asked in an excited voice. Harry chuckled silently. Hermione was looking at Tia with the same hero worship he used to see on the Creevy brothers.

Tia smiled. “We received your application for the summer internship, Ms. Granger. Very impressive.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Hermione squeaked.

Tia smiled and turned to her father. “Come along, Harry. Everyone else will be waiting for us. Good morning, ladies.”

Harry gave Luna a quick hug and politely said goodbye to the others. He held his laughter until they were down the hall.

“Merlin, Tia!” he laughed. “Poor Hermione looked like she wanted to turn into a ghost!”

“You knew Ms. Granger from before? She is an excellent researcher but she needs to learn to have a bit more fun.”

Harry laughed in agreement. “True, but how is it that Luna remembers the original past?”

Now it was Tom’s turn to laugh. “It bothered me when the Quibbler started printing stories of my being a Dark Lord. It reminded me of my time as Grindelwald’s ‘guest’. All the talk of Death Eaters and ‘where is Harry Potter’, but no one took it seriously. I use it to remind myself what I could have become.” Tom grinned wickedly, “Besides, it confuses the hell out of my opposition in the Wizengamot.”

ADAD

Tom led the way into the staff conference room. Harry paused in the doorway to look around the filled room. Ron, Michael and Katie were immediately recognizable. The dark haired man and the redheaded witch next to him he had never met but instantly recognized. Several unknown people also stood waiting in the room.

Tia stepped next to him and muttered, “They can be a bit overwhelming and I’m used to them.”

A still beautiful Andrea stepped up and put her arm around Tom waist. “It is good to see you again, professor.”

Harry laughed. “It has been a long time since I was your professor, Andrea.” Harry’s lips twitched mischievously. “How did your cousin take your marriage?”

A musical laugh came from the French witch. “He survived.” A wicked gleam came to her eye. “Alajos is the French Ministry’s Head of International Cooperation now. It makes treaty negotiations interesting.” Harry laughed with her at the image.

“Our son and his family could not get home in time to be here,” Tom added. “Jonas took his wife and daughter to India to work for

Gringotts. He has Chaz's old position. Chaz works at the Gringotts home office in Switzerland now."

"You're grandparents?" Harry asked in shock.

"Little Michele is ten now."

Before Harry could make a coherent reply, he was suddenly enveloped by a hug. He was startled until he recognized the wizard standing behind the witch hugging him. He realized for the first time since he was eighteen months old, Lily Potter was touching him. Harry hugged her back.

"Tom told us everything," she muttered in his ear. "We have no right to, but we are so proud of you!"

Shocked again, Harry released her and stepped back a bit. She sensed his surprise and loosened her grip but she didn't let him go.

"What do you mean everything?"

"We all know, Harry. The entire Potter family, except the kids still in school don't know all of the details," she answered quietly. "He told us after the baby you disappeared. I was devastated. He told us how he went Dark, us dying to save you, you growing up with my hateful sister, you defeating Voldemort, and going back in time to stop it all. He showed us the memories from your Pensieve." A shadow crossed her eyes. "I was so angry I went to Little Whining and hexed Petunia and her whole family."

Harry found himself again staring in shock for the third time in as many minutes. 'The thing about successive shocks is if they don't kill you they kind of stop making an impact,' Harry thought absently.

While he was shocked the entire room moved to encircle him. Everyone started talking to him and laughing and trying to hug him. The house elves appeared with food. The Potter clan soon settled around the large, round table to eat. (Harry was once again surprised when he realized the former Bellatrix Black was sitting directly across from him. He had to fight the impulse to go for his wand.)

The next four hours were spent meeting or getting reacquainted with his family. The Prewitt twins reminded him of toned down Weasley twins.

Harry asked them. "Did Fred and George ever open their shop?"

The twins looked around their wives at each other and then turned to Harry. "You're the mysterious silent partner?" they asked in unison. "Don't tell Molly! They left school early and she expected them to go to Phoenix, not open a joke shop."

Harry looked confused, "How did they get their money then? When I set it up with the trust with the goblins I made getting at least four NEWTS each a requirement!"

Tom smirked in answer. "They were giving Albus a hard time so I had the goblins tell them about the money at the start of their Fifth year. I didn't expect them to sneak into the NEWT exams after their Sixth year!" Harry laughed as the Prewitt twins turned in shock on the Minister of Magic. "What? I am a Slytherin you know."

A familiar bark of laughter came from behind Harry at that. Harry turned and saw the two non-family members he most wanted to see. "Sirius! You dog!" Harry wrapped the surprised wizard in a bear hug. He released him only to repeat it with the wizard standing next to him. "Moony!"

Both wizards were shocked by the sudden hugs. Sirius looked over at James and asked, "Who is this, Prongs?"

Harry looked surprised at the question. He looked at Tom. "Didn't you ever tell them?"

"Damn, he is easy!" Sirius commented to James.

Harry turned back and grinned at the dog animagus. "Yep, you're Sirius." No warning was given as a series of wandless Stinging Hexes were suddenly flying at Sirius followed by a transfiguration spell that turned him into Padfoot and locked him in the form. James and Remus led the crowd in cheering as Padfoot looked at him in shock.

Lily eventually talked Harry into releasing the lock on Padfoot. Sirius and Remus joined the family gathering as both were godparents to James and Lily's children. The conversation eventually turned into a comparison of pranks between the Marauders, La Revolution and the Weasley Twins.

Harry met his brother Jimmy and sister Sally. He also met Ron's twin children. They were both Seventh years and named Albus (Call me Al) and Thomas. Al was a member of Gryffindor whilst Thomas was in Slytherin.

When Harry first arrived in the magical world, people kept telling him how much he looked like his father. Now with a thirty-seven year old James Potter sitting nearby, Harry had to agree their resemblance was strong. But Al and Thomas were Harry's own physical age. They looked like triplets, right down to the green eyes and black hair. The only two differences were their height (6cm taller, blame the Dursleys) and lack of a lightning bolt shaped scar. Jimmy lacked only the green eyes.

Jimmy in particular was excited to meet his 'older' brother. "Luna talks about you all the time. Her stories are kind of funny. You sound like you were a real terror your Fifth year if what she says is all true." Harry had to allow that his Fifth year was ... turbulent.

Sally was kind of shy. She looked like Lily with red hair and the family green eyes. In a quiet voice she commented, "Everyone thinks we are just humoring her when we listen to her. I wanted to yell at them, 'Yes, there really is a Harry Potter', but they wouldn't let us."

Harry grinned gently at his younger sister, "Well, we'll have to just fix that." Her smile was like the sun coming out.

"Are you coming to the Quidditch match today, Harry?" Al asked (Harry refused to allow them to call him grandfather or anything like that.)

"I thought I interrupted the match yesterday?"

“This is Parents’ Weekend,” Thomas explained. “This marks the end of the season. So yesterday the bottom two teams played for third place. Today the top two teams play.”

“That sounds like fun. Are any of you playing?” Harry learned the Gryffindor line up was the same as it was his Sixth year except instead of Harry Potter at Seeker, it was Albus Potter. (Jimmy was the reserve Seeker.) They would be facing a Slytherin line up with Thomas as captain and Seeker.

“So this is for family bragging rights?”

Both boys nodded agreement. “We’ve been Seekers since our Second year. We’ve played ten matches and split them. This is the final match,” Al said with a grin.

“Plus the scouts are all here today,” Thomas added.

“That sounds like fun.” He turned to Thomas. “What is Slytherin House like now?” Harry asked.

Thomas shrugged. “Not like the stories Uncle Tom told us you dealt with. I guess you could say the moderates run the House. We still have the old school Purebloods like the Malfoys and the Dolohovs but they are almost like a sub-House. We even have a dozen Muggle-borns in the House now.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Harry smiled.

ADAD

The younger Potters dragged Harry down to the Quidditch pitch when the boys needed to report for their pre-match warm-ups. Harry would have preferred to stay and catch up with his children and their spouses, but Sally asked him and she wrapped him around her finger.

The adults laughed when Katie announced at the sight, “You were always easy, Dad. The girls could get anything out of you!”

So, Harry walked the familiar path to the Quidditch pitch to watch his grandsons play. The experience was a bit surreal. As James, Harry

had grown used to being at Hogwarts and be comfortable with the ghosts of his memories. But now those ghosts were alive. It was weird to see people he was students with who had no memory of him, greeting his grandchildren and classmates as mates. Cho still sized him up like a chunk of meat as they passed her.

“Be careful,” Thomas warned. “She has been on a hunt since Cedric dumped her over the Winter Holidays. Said she was too emotionally needy. Don’t know why it took him two years to figure that one out.”

They were just outside the pitch when Jimmy suddenly ran off with a shout he would be right back. He returned a minute later holding Ginny’s hand.

“Harry, I want you to meet my girlfriend, Ginny Weasley. Ginny, this is my brother Harry.”

Behind his Occlumency shields, Harry wasn’t sure if he wanted to laugh or cry. As he told Tom once, his adolescent feelings for her were long gone. But to find out his brother was dating her in this time was too funny.

Harry smiled politely, “I met Ms. Weasley this morning on my way to breakfast. It is nice to see you again.”

Ginny smiled and then looked at her boyfriend. “You prat! You knew Luna was right and never told me!”

Jimmy grinned back. “I did tell you. You all just thought I was winding you up!” The twins and Harry laughed as she tried to come out with a reply for that.

“Be careful, Jimmy,” Harry warned. “I think she is getting ready for her notorious Bat-Boogey Hex.” Ginny gave Harry a speculative glare. Harry merely shrugged and added, “What can I say, it is notorious. Plus my brother told me all about it. And the birthmark just over your bum.”

Ginny turned volcanic Weasley red. “Your brother? He told you what!” She whirled on Jimmy who immediately went on the defensive.

"I didn't tell him anything! I didn't even know about the birthmark." Jimmy turned and started to run as Ginny went for her wand. The small red-haired witch took off in pursuit as her boyfriend made a quick strategic retreat.

Albus and Thomas held in their mirth until Harry commented, "Actually it was Fred and George who told me about the birthmark." The Potter twins started to laugh with tears in their eyes at their grandfather's prank.

Sally was laughing alongside them. She calmed down enough to gasp out, "That one belongs in the Marauders Book of Pranks. Poor Jimmy will be weeks calming her down." As sympathetic as her words sounded, her tone was pleased. The look in her eye told Harry his sister had the legendary 'red head's temper'.

Their mirth annoyed a couple of students passing by. "Oh, go away Potters. You are making this place lower class than it already is."

All three Potter males responded without even looking, "Stuff it, Malfoy."

Harry turned and saw the blond ponce himself with Crabbe and Goyle flanking him on either side. "Go away Draco. Today is too special to waste with messing with you."

The Malfoy sneer appeared. "And who do you think you are? A poor relation to those do-gooder Potters no doubt."

"No doubt," Harry answered in apparent agreement. The blond Slytherin's comments might have bothered him as a student, but physical appearances aside, mentally he was close to thirty years old. And after two Dark Lords, the ferret had nothing on him. "Let's go, guys."

"What is this disturbance?" a cool, sneering voice asked.

'Was everybody at Hogwarts today?' Harry wondered. He turned around to see two of his (least) favorite people: Severus Snape and Lucius Malfoy. Draco gave them a triumphant sneer from behind them.

“Lucius, Severus, it is nice to see you again.”

Lucius looked down his nose at Harry. “And who are you to address me like that?”

Harry ignored that question. “Do you have an elf named Dobby in your employ?” Harry caught a confirming flash of recognition in the other wizard’s eyes. “Dobby!” Harry called out.

An instant later a small pop was heard and a cringing Dobby appeared. “Strange wizard calls for Dobby?”

“How dare you call for my elf, Potter!” Lucius seethed.

Harry ignored them. He knelt down to eye level with the elf. “Do you like working for them, Dobby?” he asked in a gentle tone. Dobby looked fearfully up at Lucius before shaking his head. “Do you want to be free?” A glance was all it took.

Harry stood back up. “Lucius Malfoy, I am calling in a life-debt owed by your father Abraxus Malfoy. You will release Dobby the House-Elf and give him his freedom.”

The elder Malfoy looked shocked. “I don’t owe you a life-debt! You are delusional, boy!”

Harry shrugged. “Check your magic. You won’t be able to cast anything stronger than a Tickling Charm until you comply with my request.”

Malfoy turned white as he realized what Harry said was true. “How could my father owe a life-debt to you? He died ten years ago!”

Harry gave him an innocent smile. “That doesn’t matter. You acknowledge the debt?”

Malfoy was muttering, “Father only owed a debt to...” Malfoy stopped and turned even paler than before. He stripped off a glove and thrust it into the shocked Dobby’s hands. “Here elf. Now get out of my sight!”

Dobby was staring at the glove. Harry didn't think Dobby even heard his former master give him a command. "Just stay with me Dobby. We'll get you set up with a job later." Now Dobby was looking at Harry with hero worship in his eyes.

Malfoy stepped up and glared down at Harry from his superior height. In low, threatening tones, he said, "You lost me my elf, boy. You've not heard the last of this matter!"

Harry grinned back at him. "Okay, Lucy. See you around."

"Is there a problem here?"

Harry glanced over to see Albus standing there with Professor McGonagall. "No, Professor Dumbledore. We were just discussing house-elf rights. Heated political discussion you know."

"Ah, yes, but perhaps we might save it for after the match?" the Headmaster suggested.

Lucius gave Harry one last sneer before striding away with his son in tow.

Dumbledore walked over to stand next to Harry.

"An interesting weekend here, Albus," Harry commented.

"Indeed, Harry. Did you have to start a feud with the Malfoy's already?"

Harry shrugged. "I have a feeling the Potters and the Malfoys have been feuding since they arrived here from France. Besides, I owed it to get Dobby out of his house." The house elf in question was now wrapped around Harry's leg crying tears of joy.

"We don't appreciate the poor behavior or manners here, sir," McGonagall said in a disapproving tone. "I understand you are here visiting with the Potters but poor behavior will not be tolerated, young man. Please refer to the Headmaster as Professor Dumbledore."

Harry grinned at his former professor and former student. "Relax, Ms. McGonagall. By the way, I do remember who really placed that water balloon prank on the entrance to Ravenclaw Tower in your Third year. Did you ever get over your tendency of dropping the tip of your wand after casting a spell in a dual?" The Transfiguration Professor looked speechless. The Potter twins and Sally looked just as shocked at the idea of McGonagall as a prankster.

Harry winked at the madly twinkling Dumbledore and said to the younger Potters, "Come on guys, it looks like you need to get to your teams."

As Harry led his young relatives away, he heard Minerva sputtering behind him, "But Albus, how did he know that!"

ADAD

Harry was pranked in return a short time later by Tom. Actually it wasn't a prank. He merely set up the situation and allowed things to play out.

Slytherin won the match but Albus managed to catch the Snitch. It reminded Harry of his first Quidditch World Cup. He had enjoyed the match surrounded by his all of his family that was at the school and not playing in the match. Afterwards, they all moved to a picnic lunch that the school arranged outside the stadium.

The sun was setting over the Forbidden Forest and many of the parents were starting to leave for home. Magical parents were drifting towards Hogsmeade to either Apparate or Floo home. Parents of Muggle-born students were using the Knight Bus to leave the school.

Harry was sitting on a blanket talking with his mother, Tia and Katie. Jimmy, Ginny, Ron, Hermione, Neville, and Luna were sitting at a blanket several feet away from them. They were joined by Padma and several students Harry did not recognize from his time here. Albus had mentioned earlier that the average House class size was 12 now against the 8 when Harry was here. The school now had 337 students against the 223 they had in the previous time. Albus assumed the difference was all of the deaths caused during

Voldemort's rise since most of the 'new' students were either children of Muggle-borns or Muggle-borns themselves.

Whilst listening to his daughters and mother talking about some little issues, Harry noticed Hermione's parents approaching. He guessed they were preparing to leave like the others. They were about three meters away when his eyes drifted to the older woman walking with them. She looked much younger than Harry would have expected her to be having a granddaughter Hermione's age. Her hair was still close to Hermione's color and curly, but not nearly as bushy. Then the woman glanced at Harry.

Harry found himself standing with both his holly wands dropping out of the sheaths into his hands. An observer would have said he held them casually, but anyone who had dueled him would know he was poised for an instant attack.

"What are you doing here, Christina?" he asked in a quiet, but deadly voice.

The old woman turned to face Harry with an odd expression on her face. "I'm sorry my name is Mary Granger, not Christina."

Harry didn't believe it for a second. "How did you get out of that tower before your master destroyed it?"

"What are you doing?!" Hermione screamed as she jumped in between them. "Put your wands away! Grandma is a Muggle, not a witch! I am Muggle-born, remember!"

Harry ignored her. "Mary? For Maria, your sister?"

The woman looked shaken. "You knew Maria?" She looked at Harry and mouthed, "Count?" Harry's head made a slight twitch of a nod. She put her hand on Hermione's (her granddaughter's?) shoulder and said, "It is alright dear. This young man and I just need to talk about some old business."

Hermione gave her an incredulous look. "Grandma, how do you know him? You didn't know any wizards before you came here today."

"We'll talk later, dear. But I am afraid the young man here needs to talk with me first." She gave Hermione a brief hug.

"Mum?" Mr. Granger asked uncertainly.

"It's okay, dear. Talk with your brilliant daughter for a bit. I'll be back shortly." She turned to Harry. "Shall we go somewhere more private?"

Harry's wands had moved back into their sheaths but a simple flex would move them right back. "After you. I believe you know the way to my office." Harry ignored the questions coming from the other Potters as they walked away.

A small smile Harry remembered very well crossed the old woman's lips. Christina started walking across the lawns. Neither spoke as they walked to the school. Harry hissed the password to open the door to his office.

Harry gestured her to a seat. "Why are you here?"

"Hermione invited me. I stayed away from the magical world for the last fifty years. My Robert was a Muggle. Dan, Hermione's father is a squib. How did you stay so young? You haven't aged a day since the battle."

Harry ignored the question. "Tom knows your secret, doesn't he?"

"He does. I immigrated here in 1950. Robert was a British Army captain. Dan was born shortly after we arrived. I was relieved when he was not gifted. I stayed away when Hermione got her letter from Hogwarts. She is a brilliant witch even if I did have to play the ignorant Muggle."

'Can I have any more shocks today?' Harry wondered.

"She does remind me of your sisters; Serena's books with Maria's causes and a bit of your fighting spirit."

A proud look crossed the old woman's face before an odd look crossed her eyes. "You knew my sisters?"

“Tom never told you?”

Christina, or Mary Granger, looked at the floor. “We never talked. He sent me a letter when Hermione got hers. He was Minister by then and wanted to let me know he wouldn’t be sending the Aurors after me. I sent him a letter back thanking him and apologizing for what I helped do to him, but we never talked.”

“I see. Well, Serena helped us get into Durmstrang to save Tom. And Maria was one of our agents in Germany. I knew her very well.”

“She died in Berlin,” Christina said softly. “An Allied bomb landed on the beer house she ran.”

“Actually, she and her son Alan got out of Germany with us when we rescued Tom. Last I heard in ’45 she was living in a Veela colony in Bulgaria.” Christina looked at him in shock.

They talked for the next hour until Harry was satisfied the former Dark Witch was no longer a threat to him or his family. She claimed to no longer own a wand. Harry wasn’t sure of that, but he bet Tom had her watched when he first learned of her presence in England. For now, Harry was willing to let her go without hexing her. He decided that if Tom forgave her, he had to let it go.

They did not speak as they walked back to the picnic. Harry was sure the Grangers would be very concerned about ‘Mary’. The thing that boggled his mind was Hermione was the same here as she was in his old timeline. Didn’t that mean the former Dark Witch was also the grandmother of the girl he grew up with in Gryffindor House?

Time travel made his head hurt.

The grin on Tom’s face as they returned didn’t help. Harry realized Tom had known the encounter was likely. “Brat set us up.” he muttered. The look on Christina’s face told him she reached the same conclusion.

“Tom, I need to burn off some energy. How about we put on an exhibition duel?” Harry offered.

Before Tom could respond, Christina added, "I think that would be a wonderful idea. I'd love to see a wizard's duel. Maybe I can offer the young man here some pointers since you are so much more experienced than he is."

Tom's smug expression dropped as the Count and Christina smiled at him like hungry wolves. For a moment he was no longer the Minister of Magic and considered with Albus Dumbledore to be one of the two most powerful wizards on the planet. For that moment he was a Sixth year student again looking at the two most gifted fighters of a brutal war who had also been his teachers.

"Oh, crap."

19 April 1997 - Hogsmeade

"How has your week been, Dad? I haven't seen you much."

Harry looked up at his eldest son. He sighed. "I guess I have just been caught up in getting over your mother's death. Last weekend I sealed it behind my shields to get over it but I knew I had to deal with it. Dobby has been helping me clean up the house and sort through our things."

Tom settled onto the now old-fashioned couch across from his father's chair. "We had a lot of good memories in this house. I'm glad you decided to move back in here. I think mum would have wanted you here."

"It's hard though," Harry sighed. "I keep expecting her to walk around the corner. Even if you've gotten as old as shite, I haven't changed."

Tom laughed as he protested, "Hey, I am not the one in the room with great-grandchildren."

Harry snickered. "So, what brings you around today? You have the same look you used to get when you had something to tell me."

"What would I have to tell you?" Tom asked.

Harry blew a breath out. "And it is something you think I don't want to hear. You did the same thing when you were eight and you and Snuffles tracked mud into the house. Now spill it."

Now it was Tom's turn to sigh. "I didn't want to tell you this, but I remember your stories about growing up so I don't want to make the same mistake."

"Tom."

"Twelve months ago to the day you arrived, Sibyll Trelawney walked into my office in a trance. She told me 'The Man with the Killing Eyes, The Vanquisher and the Redeemer will return. His arrival will mark the start of Dark's Rise.' Then she lapsed into gibberish."

Harry looked at Tom in shock.

"Dad, I'm afraid it's not over."

A/N: I am dedicating this chapter to everyone who reviewed throughout the writing of Altered Destinies. I started off planning on writing a much smaller piece focusing on the relationship between Harry/James and Tom. The original story is still very much in there, but your reviews and comments made it every so much more.

I will be working on finished my other stories before working on the sequel, so watch my profile page for updates. (Yes, there will be a sequel.)